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inter**Z**one

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New stories by

Paul Di Filippo

Jennifer Swift

George Jenner

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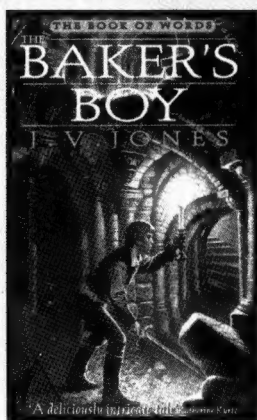
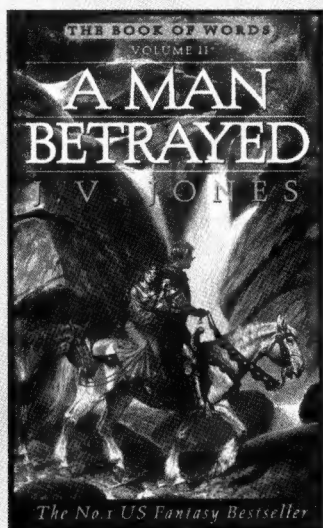
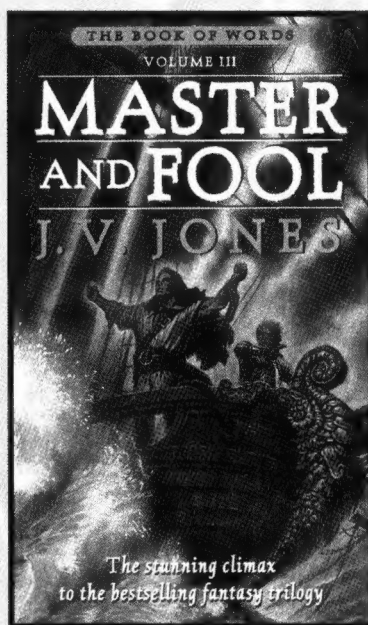
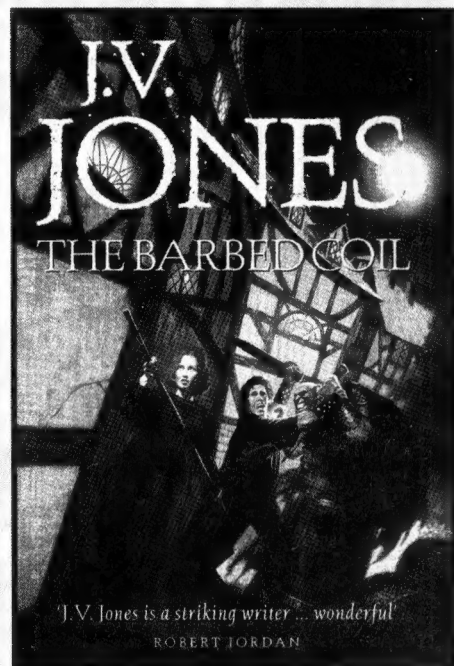
and an interview with

Paul Cornell

THE
UNINVITED

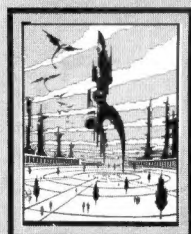
‘J.V. Jones is a striking
writer... wonderful’

Robert Jordan



J.V. JONES
THE BRIGHTEST
NEW STAR IN
FANTASY





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interZone

November 1997

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science fiction & fantasy

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+ Interaction +

Is it really SF?

Dear Editors:

In *Interzone* 123's editorial David Pringle lists books that, he says, are science fiction although they were not acknowledged as such. Amongst these are at least two "alternative histories." This classification of alternative history as sf doesn't seem to be supported by any of my dictionaries, encyclopedias, or other reference books.

All fiction is to a degree alternative history (as, indeed, is much that claims to be history!). In some adventure stories the alternative-history content is considerable (e.g. *Ivanhoe* and *Robin Hood*). In my youth I read many other novels that presented historical alternatives – particularly when pirate kings of the African coast were involved. And I vaguely remember one that dealt with an imaginary diplomatic military defeat of Germany by ourselves around the turn of the century. There were also elaborate adventure stories set in wholly or partly imaginary countries by writers such as Rider Haggard and John Buchan.

Admittedly the alternative-history stories in *Interzone* do place more emphasis on the alternative and less on the adventure, with part of the interest being the way historical characters pop up doing the wrong job. But this does not obviously make them science fiction, nor is it apparent that they should appeal to the same readership (you have probably deduced by now that they do not much appeal to me).

It would be interesting to have an explanation of when fiction becomes alternative history and when alternative history becomes science fiction. Or perhaps *Interzone*'s mission statement should be changed to "science fiction, fantasy and alternative history."

Laurie Jones
Beckenham, Kent

Editor: If you regard sf as a kind of fiction that deals in imaginary other societies, other worlds, other times or other beings, which are rationally conceived (Darko Suvin's "literature of cognitive estrangement"), then of course alternative history can be seen as a sub-type of sf. Admittedly, some alternative-timestream fictions may be cast as fantasy (worlds where magic works, etc) and others may be so mundane, so little altered from our present reality (like the Buchanish thrillers and Ruritanian adventures

of the past you refer to), that they scarcely count; but for the most part the "classics" of alternative-world fiction – Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* (1953), Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration* (1976), etc – are certainly sf and have always been accepted as such by readers and critics.

The earliest alternative-history novel that we know of, Louis Geoffroy's *Napoléon et la conquête du monde* (1836; retitled *Napoléon apocryphe* in its second edition), shows very clearly its close links with sf of the more futuristic sort: Bonaparte not only wins the Battle of Waterloo and lives to become emperor of the world, but he reaches the (then-undiscovered) North Pole and ushers in a global technological utopia full of airships and the like. Unfortunately, this interesting old work is not available in English (our 19th-century British forebears no doubt kept it at arms' length for political reasons) but it's described in great detail, with quotations, in Paul K. Alkon's excellent book *Origins of Futuristic Fiction* (University of Georgia Press, 1987) – well worth ordering from a library if you have a serious interest in the history of sf.

Dear Editors:

You asked for comments on the various "non-sf" sf books listed in issue 123's "Interaction." I've read Andrew Roberts's *The Aachen Memorandum*, and it's... appalling. I'm quite happy it wasn't marketed as sf – it would have done the genre a disservice.

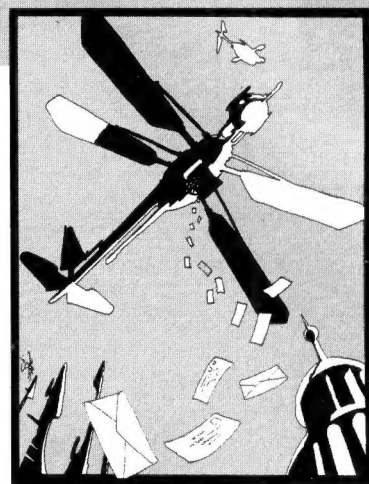
The Aachen Memorandum (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995) describes a plot by the Germans to take over a federated Europe, foiled by a *Times* stringer. The writing is dreadful, and the book's politics are somewhere to the right of Oswald Mosley. In a climactic scene, the hero discovers how the referendum that took the UK into the Federal States of Europe was "fixed" (because, after all, the British never really wanted to join Europe; it was all a plot by nasty self-serving Eurocrats). Apparently, the conspirators fitted a chip, in the collating mainframe computer, back-to-front so it would turn every "yes" vote into a "no." Honest.

I've read better web-published fiction.

Ian Sales

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Editor: Thanks for that, Ian. Of course, I never expected that all those



mainstream sf novels would be good – it's just that we sf buffs (in what a cynic, or John Clute, might call our imperial grasp) have an urge to know about all these things. We've already received a short review of another of those books, *Wurd* by Chris Wilson (1995), which claims that that particular novel is a minor masterpiece (see last issue). And that's how it will go, I'm sure: some will turn out to be good, some bad – but it's all grist to the sf information mill.

Dear Editors:

Since you asked, here's a review of *The Dog King* by Christoph Ransmayr, translated by John E. Woods from the original German (Chatto & Windus, June 1997, 355pp, £15.99):

In 1996 Christoph Ransmayr's novel *The Dog King* was awarded the Aristeion Prize for Literature by the Danish Literature Information Centre, which its publishers regard as "Europe's most prestigious prize." The novel offers a twist upon the usual post-World War II alternative-timeline sub-genre recently featured in *Fatherland* by Robert Harris and '48 by James Herbert, with its focus upon what would have happened if the Allies had won the war.

As the war in the Pacific still rages, the Allies, horrified by the atrocities of the Third Reich, transform Germany back to a preindustrial society – which is achieved through the removal of utilities to produce a landscape similar to the former Yugoslavia where modern technology coexists with primitive resources. The Germans are forced into re-enacting the atrocities of the Nazis through penitence societies and rituals organized by the occupying forces, through non-violent remembrance such as dressing as concentration-camp inmates to pose for photographers, in a landscape where wild gangs of skinheads roam the countryside attacking all who stray in their path.

Ransmayr's story revolves around Moor, a small mountainous resort town and Bering, its blacksmith and later bodyguard to Ambras who governs the village as an embittered former inmate of the local camp. Ambras lives in a deserted mansion with a pack of the camp's guard-dog descendants. The novel passes through 20 years of Bering's life, focusing upon his relationship with Ambras as it moves towards a doomed three-way semi-romantic triangle with Lily, a black-marketeer with whom they seek escape from Germany.

The novel is a subtle addition to the sub-genre when compared to the thriller elements of '48 and *Fatherland*, with its emphasis on real mentally-scarred people thrown together in unique circumstances. The Germans in the novel are portrayed as the descendants of those who contributed to the Third Reich and can barely comprehend their forefathers' society and existence, let alone the circumstances which led to them being stripped of their technology. As you may have guessed by now, the novel is short on humour as it slides towards its pessimistic conclusion which is surprisingly reminiscent of Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Well-written, with a superbly realized sense of place, *The Dog King* is recommended.

Ian Andrew Allwyn
Loughborough, Leicestershire

Dear Editors:

Chris Gilmore gathers his skirts up in horror at the political content of Ian Watson's *Oracle* (review, *IZ* 123). Apparently Watson's "political sympathies are such as few of bourgeois-liberal-democratic predilections could share." I'm thinking – my God, what is he, a genocidal fascist? Oh no, it appears that he is – wait for it – to the left of Tony Blair (!). Excuse me while I laugh like a drain. This has got to be the stupidest objection to someone's political beliefs I have ever read in a serious review.

Anyway, Gilmore also objects to Watson giving his main character strong opinions on the sinking of the *Belgrano* (I can imagine why this is a sore point). Which gives me an opportunity to stop abusing your contributors (at least directly) and raise an old issue again. After I finished laughing it occurred to me that the sinking of the *Belgrano* – putting to an end as it did the peace negotiations between the British and Argentinean representatives in Washington – is probably the single most pivotal moment in UK history over the last two decades. On a par, in other words, with the JFK assassination as a point of departure for those constructing Alternative or Parallel Worlds.

Just think about it – the sinking precipitated a full-scale war between the UK and Argentina. The war in

turn transformed Thatcher from the least to the most popular British PM since Churchill. It was only once this had happened that the political transformation of the UK to a "Thatcherite" model took place, and altered our relationships with both the USA and Europe. And that in turn has affected every single UK resident in ways hard to predict, and easy to disagree over. In other words – change this one point in history, and the rest is up for grabs. Anyone got any other suggestions for a "world pivot"?

Alison Page
Coventry

Dear Editors:

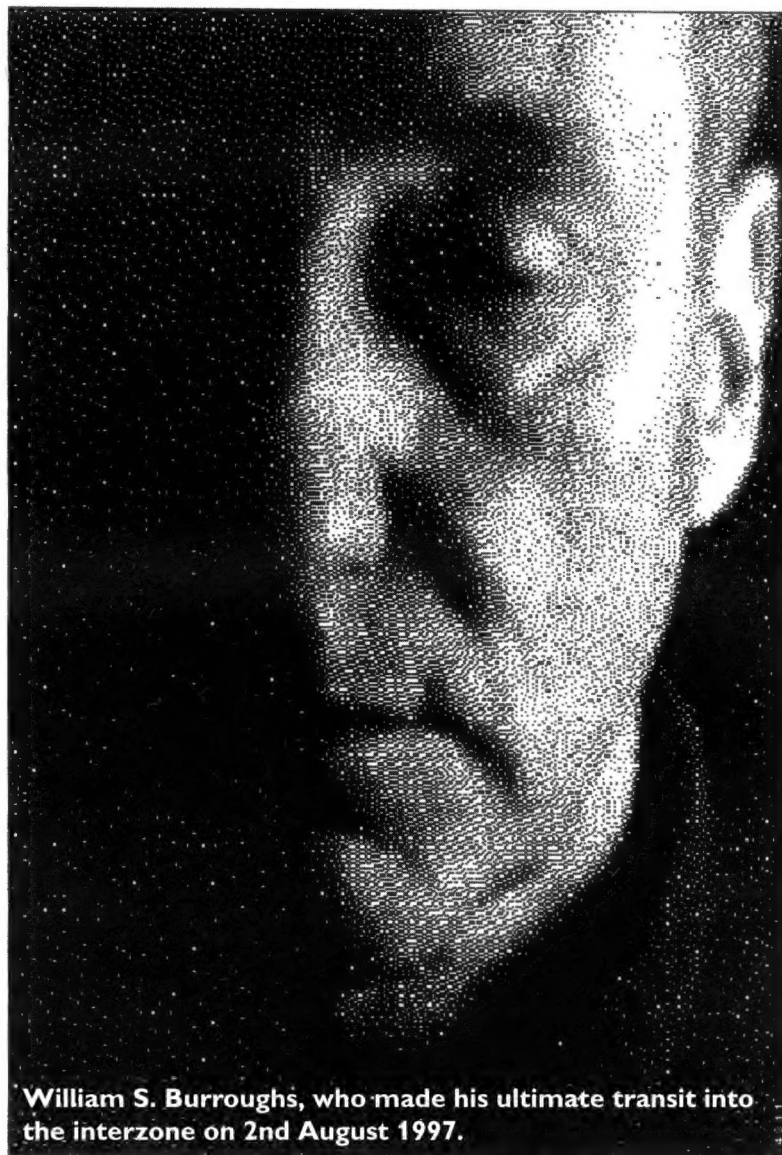
I just had to write and thank you for publishing Gwyneth Jones's "The Grass Princess" in your August issue. I've often wondered what sort of story wins a World Fantasy Award, and I admit I approached the work with caution (not being a great fan of Booker Prize-winning novels *et al*), but I'm delighted to say I was not

disappointed. In fact, I enjoyed the story so much, everything else in the issue paled by comparison.

Speaking of comparisons, it struck me on a second reading that *Interzone* rarely publishes tales like this. In fact, "The Grass Princess" is one of the most un-*Interzone* stories I think I've ever read between your pages. Is it a UK/USA thing? A female thing? Or do you simply not get sent many World Award-winning-standard fantasies?

Just a thought: presumably a story has to be published somewhere before it can win an award. One is driven to ask why the talented Gwyneth Jones found it necessary initially to publish such a fine piece in a "small-press" collection. Are there no professional markets for this sort of tale, even in the USA? Thinking of the formula trilogy doorstoppers that seem to make up so much of today's fantasy marketplace, I'd say it's about time we asked ourselves why.

Katherine Roberts
Bridstow, Ross-on-Wye



William S. Burroughs, who made his ultimate transit into the interzone on 2nd August 1997.

(Photograph and photocopier processing by Bernard Sigaud.)



IN THE CUT-ADrift BRITISH COLONY OF KENYA, EAST AFRICA, Year of our Lord 1939, beneath the shadows of the Aberdare Mountains, by the shores of treacherous, man-swallowing Lake Naivasha, where the cool and fertile highlands with their vertigo-inducing skies began to stretch their limbs, there stood the creamy stone mansion familiarly called Djinn Palace, home to Joss and Molly Erroll, frayed nerve centre of the cast-away European settlers in Happy Valley.

At a small remove from the large pillared and porticoed house and its many outbuildings and guest cottages, several lovingly tended emerald polo fields maintained their European breeding in the face of the patient African foliage – jacaranda, flame trees, eucalyptus, thorn and cedar – held at bay only by the constant efforts of an extensive staff of Masai, Kikuyu, Kavirondo, Wakamba and Somalian servants. Upon one of the fields a game was now in progress. There sounded the sod-softened thunder of hooves, the whack of mallet upon ball, and the jubilant braying English voices of men and women, players and spectators.

“Jolly nice play!” “Bloody hell!” “I say, you cad!” “Well done!” “Queen’s knickers!” “Bit of all right there!”

In the midst of this frenetic, sweaty game a low dron-

ing noise as of an aggrieved hornet, swelling in intensity, eventually made itself obtrusive. One by one the players reined up their mounts, forming a small spontaneous cluster of riders, all angled towards the direction of the noise. The unattended ivory ball rolled to a stop amidst the blades of grass, revealing a strange asymmetry.

Shading his eyes, Joss Erroll, an overpoweringly handsome man in his thirties, straight pale gold hair brushed up into wings on either side of his head, spoke. “I see it now. By God, it *is* a plane. First one in, what, ten months? There, above that peak –”

His wife Molly, petite, auburn-haired, said, “Who *can* it be? I thought all the locals were grounded, by order of dear old Gwladys....”

A tall, cruel-eyed fellow, John Carberry, master of the ranch at semi-distant Nyeri called Seremai (“Place of Death” in Masai), said with languid gruffness, “Not a shabby European, I venture. That lot has had it. Dead as the dodo, or near enough so as not to matter, the whole filthy, weak-limbed bunch of them. No, if anyone survives, it’ll be the Americans.”

Used to Carberry’s self-slighting invective, his compatriots ignored him.



Alice de Trafford, a slight, elfishly beautiful woman, possessor of high cheekbones and violet eyes, said, "Lizzie, you've got the best sight amongst us. Can you see what kind of plane it is?"

Julian "Lizzie" Lezard, one of the audience, a bumble-footed, untidy, unshaven, yet somehow attractive youth with the air of a perpetual schoolboy cutup, replied, "I never rely on my own talents alone if I can help it, Comtesse. As it happens, thanks to my intense cultural swotting up recently, I've got just the thing we need right here." Lizzie held aloft a pair of opera glasses, and received a round of delighted applause. Focusing the glasses, he announced, "I do believe, based on observing some trials a year or two ago in Paris, that it's a Frenchie vehicle. A Simoun, perhaps. Let's see if I can make out the registration – yes, it's Eff dash Ay En Ex Are –"

As the buzzing plane rapidly approached, even the unaided eye could soon discern that its mode of progression was alarmingly erratic. Its wings dipped first left, then right; its nose drooped, then jerked up.

"Five pounds says it crashes!" called out Carberry.

"You're on!" answered Joss.

Now soaring above the ring of trees surrounding the

polo fields, the plane was so low its landing gear clipped the leafy crowns. The unseen pilot appeared unaware of or oblivious to his plight, failing to gain height or even throttle back. And so as it crossed the perimeter of the lawn, the Simoun was aimed like a runaway missile straight at the groundlings.

"Scatter!" called out Joss, spurring his own horse.



At approximately one hundred miles per hour, the plane ploughed into the soft lawn, drawing a long loamy gouge. So violent was the impact that the plane's engine was expelled from its frame like a spat-out seed, travelling a further distance beyond the plane's final grave.

Silence reigned for a moment. Then Carberry spoke. "Pay up, old man."

"Of course," replied Joss sanguinely. "Back at the house. Meanwhile, I suppose we should have a look at our visitor."

"Oh, he's dead," Carberry maintained in a hopeful manner. "No one could survive that."

As if on cue, the mangled cockpit door of the crumpled steaming wreck emitted a hideous grating squeal as it was pushed open from within, falling thence, hin-

geless, to the turf.

From inside, a bulky figure in blood-stained coveralls unfolded itself. Clutching something, levering himself one-handedly and painfully through the doorframe, the oversized pilot followed his door to the grass, landing face-first.

The players and spectators rushed over to him. Hands turned the aviator over onto his back. In his grip was a hatbox which, opened, proved to be full of scribbled papers and one printed book.

Kiki Preston, an American, black sheep of the Whitney clan, said in her ineffably gay manner, "Why, it's that fabulous flyboy-writer-whatchamacall-him, Saint Soupy! His face was all over New York last year." Kiki saddened. "New York. To think it's no more—"

Joss dismounted, took off his neckerchief, wet it on his tongue – several women sighed melodramatically – and dabbed gently at the aviator's unconscious bloody face. Removing the pilot's shattered glare glasses, he said, "I believe our Miss Kiki is correct. I too recognize the famous Antoine de Saint-Exupery."

Standing, Joss snapped his fingers and was instantly surrounded by richly uniformed servants.

"Yes, Bwana?"

"Fix up a stretcher and carry our guest to the East bedroom. Send a car to Nairobi for Doctor Vint."

"Yes, Bwana."

"Listen!" cried Kiki with delight. "He's trying to say something!"

Saint-Exupery's feebly murmured words sounded like nonsense. "Tayara boum-boum, tayara boum-boum...."

"He's attempting to sing!" claimed Lizzie. "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!"

Joss shook his head with wry disdain. "I think not, Lizzie. But we'll find out for certain if he survives."

After Saint-Exupery had been carried off, Joss remounted.

"Well, considering all the wagers placed, I propose we continue our game on the adjoining field, as this one is now decidedly unsuitable. Will someone get the ball, please?"

Lady Idina, Joss's ex-wife, galloped over and, bending down from the saddle without stopping, scooped up the ball. Returning, she held it aloft: a polished human skull, *sans* jawbone, bearing the fracture marks of many solid mallet whacks.

"It looks as if old Playfair is about ready for retirement," Lady Idina said blithely. "I know he asked us to keep him part of the game as long as we could, but we can't play with inferior equipment now, can we?"

Joss smiled at his former wife. "I daresay there'll be other candidates soon enough."



Antoine de Saint-Exupery – Tonio Saint-Ex to his extensive net of friends and family – awoke to a variety of sights, sounds and smells.

Gauzy curtains fluttered at a tall open window, whence poured in sunshine reminiscent of the glorious light that once drenched his mother's home at Saint-Maurice. Also from outside came exotic birdsong and the scents of many blooms: jasmine, frangipani, bougainvillea. From within the house breakfast smells wafted up, accompanied by the clatter of dishes and the muted hum of voices.

Saint-Ex levered himself up instinctively, then col-

lapsed back upon the crisp clean sheets with a loud groan. His entire body was a mass of aches and pains. What had happened, how had he got here, wherever "here" was—?

It all washed over him in an instant. Fuelling the Simoun himself at deserted Le Bourget field (pushing aside the blood-drenched corpse of a mechanic, a friend, who had collapsed across the pump). Taking off down the body-strewn runway without benefit of weather forecast or co-pilot for what would, if he prospered, be at least a three-day flight. Crossing the vast cemetery that was France, its cities now necropoli. His mind left free to confront the enormity of the world's tragedy, once the pathless waters of the Mediterranean were below him, hours in which there was no assurance, as he had once written, of possession of anything in the world. Sighting the familiar beloved coast of his North Africa, picking up the old Aeropostale route at Algiers, following it for a while east before veering south, his path dictated by *pifometre*, sheer flier's instinct. The night coming on, the darkness he had once loved – when only the glow of the instruments seductively beckoned – now a mockery. His eyes growing gritty with fatigue, his mouth tasting of too many cigarettes and brandy swigged from a Thermos. The first dawn, and a refuelling stop at Malakal on the Nile, where all the natives had been astonished to see a white man still alive. Then back in the air for an eternity of landscape unpeeling as if off an enormous roll hidden below the horizon. Popping two Benzedrines at dusk, another dawn, refuelling at Juba (for one hallucinatory moment he thought he was not at *Juba* but at *Juby*, that first halcyon posting now lost in a nostalgic haze). The third dawn coming up after a lost, Benzedrine-hazed 24 hours to reveal the Great Rift Valley below him, its herds of wildlife exuding what he could swear was a renewed exuberance in the face of mankind's great defeat.

And then, sighting the green field he prayed was at least somewhere near his destination. Fighting for control of the plane with flickering consciousness, but losing it, raking that final cruel furrow across Mother Earth's fair bosom—

Saint-Ex dragged one big hand with its oil-stained cuticles across his rugged, not unalluring countenance and monkish tonsure, the latter a product not of choice, but of familial baldness. How had he got from the wreck to this bed? He lifted up the soothing sheets (thoughts of Marguerite Chapeys, the ancient housekeeper at Saint-Maurice and her endless mending of linens surfaced, then melted away). His sturdy frame (Saint-Ex's somatype was dubbed *style armoire a glace*, or "hulking brute") was sporting green silk pyjamas with a crest on the bosom. Incredible! Once again his luck had held.

How many forced landings and crashes had he survived? The minor ones were innumerable and forgettable, just part of the job, but the larger ones he would always recall. The Libyan desert, the Indochinese swamp, the bay at Saint-Raphael, the takeoff in Guatemala— That last and most inglorious incident – an overloaded plane he should have double-checked, without relying on Prevost – had left him with nagging disabilities that would only be exacerbated by another hard landing so soon. Yet he would not mourn nor indulge in self-pity! He was alive, was he not, when so many others, so many millions, were dead? His mother, his sisters, Consuelo, Louise, all his

mignonettes, the beautiful women he had adored, if only for a moment or a night. God, what a waste! The extinction of so many unique worlds within the skull....

There came a polite knock on the bedroom door, interrupting Saint-Ex's sad reverie. He tried to call out a welcome, but disused speech apparatus produced only a croak.

Taken as assent, his croak caused the door to swing open. In stepped a handsome blonde white man wearing a plaid skirt, followed by a string of servants bearing trays of food, shaving equipment, hot towels, and hampers of fresh clothing.

"Joss Erroll," said the white man. "Servants heard your exclamation and summoned me. How are you feeling?"

The smell of the food brought a freshet of saliva to his parched throat, and Saint-Ex found speech reluctantly returning. "I beg your pardon, *M'sieur* Erroll, I speak only French."

Instantly switching languages, Joss continued in a somewhat fractured patois. "Of course. Saint-Exupery's love and mastery of his native tongue is well known. I'm afraid my own French, drilled into me at Eton – before I was sacked, that is – is somewhat rusty."

Joss came to sit on the bed beside Saint-Ex. The close presence of the epically good-looking stranger made the aviator uneasy, and he struggled to move away a bit and sit up. Seeing this, Joss hastened to aid Saint-Ex, lifting him with easy strength and adjusting pillows around him.

Settled, Saint-Ex asked, "Where am I? What happened?"

Joss recounted Saint-Ex's abrupt and near-fatal arrival into Happy Valley, concluding, "You've been unconscious for several days, but Doctor Vint and a team of volunteer nurses – most of the ladies in the Palace, in fact, all quite eager to, um, lend a hand – have been giving you the very best care. The Doctor couldn't believe you escaped with only a few fractures and a minor concussion. But when I told him who you were, he understood completely."

This appeal to Saint-Ex's legendary reputation had its predictable effect, lifting his spirits considerably. "I have a guardian angel, *M'sieur* Erroll. She keeps me safe from storms, cheating publishers, and jealous husbands."

Joss smiled. "You won't find many of the latter hereabouts, I wager." His host laid a soft hand on Saint-Ex's forehead, startling him. "Your fever seems gone. Think you could eat anything?"

"I could do justice to at least six breakfasts!"

Joss stood. "Very good, since that's just what we've brought." The skirted master of Djinn Palace snapped his fingers, and servants soon turned Saint-Ex's bed into a shining plain of silver platters.

"We've paw-paws, bacon *na mayai*, partridge, fried bananas, eggs. Coffee, of course, from Thika – Well, you can see for yourself. Be sure to try the *piri-piri* juice and the tommie meat. Nothing like them back home."

Mention of Europe brought a cloud to Saint-Ex's countenance. "The plague, the dying world – that's why I've come! I have a scheme, a plan for recovery! We must begin now to restore civilization –"

Saint-Ex made as if to get up, but was restrained by Joss.

"Can't restore civilization on an empty stomach now,

can we, Tonio? May I call you Tonio? Of course I may! I'm the lord of the manor here, after all. Though you wouldn't know it to ask my wife! Now, why don't you tuck in first, enrich your blood a bit, then we can all bash together and pitch right in to picking this old sot of a world up and brushing its pants off."

Simultaneously mollified and a trifle irked by his host's levity, Saint-Ex decided his advice was nonetheless sound. Lifting up a fork, he was struck with another thought.

"My papers, that book –!"

"All safe and sound, man! Don't fret, they're right on your nightstand. I'm going to leave you now. The boys here will groom and dress you when you're done, if you feel up to coming down."

Joss moved to exit, then stopped and turned with an inquisitive look. "May I ask you a question? Right after you climbed from the plane, you were mumbling something. It sounded like 'tara-boom-boom'...?"

Saint-Ex pondered a moment. "Oh, I must have hallucinated I was back in Libya, after another crash. It was then I told the Bedouins who found Prevost and me dying of thirst, 'Tayara boum-boum! Airplane fall!'"

"Splendid! I believe I shall go and collect on a small bet now. Enjoy your meal."

Alone, Saint-Ex swooped down on his food like a famished bird of prey. When he had stuffed himself to the limit, he eagerly assembled his papers and the lone volume on his lap, motioning off the servants for a moment longer. Picking up the book, he bestowed a kiss on it, ran his finger down the spine and its title: *Things to Come: A Film*.

"Ah, *M'sieur* Wells – together, you and I will set things right!"



When Saint-Ex awoke for the second time in his new bed, it was to syrupy darkness mitigated by a single lit candle, and to the unmistakable coughing calls of lions. For a moment, he once again had no idea of where he was. When memory returned, he knew chagrin.

He was lying atop the coverlets, dressed in a white tuxedo. After breakfast, after the silent yet efficient servants had bathed and shaved and kitted him out – in formal wear, despite his protestations – Saint-Ex had lain down, weary, for just a minute's shut-eye. That had to have been at least twelve hours ago.

Saint-Ex got to his feet. Inventorying his powers, he was surprised to find himself feeling rather well. All the accounting of old pains was there, with new ones added to the tally, but the sum was not more than he could pay.

Picking up the candle and his copy of *Things to Come*, Saint-Ex ventured from his bedroom.

Following music and voices, he found stairs and descended.

A parlour, lit by oil lamps, contained a dozen or more people of mixed sexes, seated on elegant European furniture and hide-strewn tiled floor. Saint-Ex spotted his host (champagne flute in hand, still mysteriously be-skirted), but naturally recognized no other face.

Upon Saint-Ex's entrance, shouts of jubilation and assorted good-natured catcalls were raised.

"A new warm body for the game!" "Bring that chap a drink!" "Pink gin for the brave flier!" "Gin Palace for-

ever!" "Pinkies all around!"

Making little sense of the English phrases, Saint-Ex came into the lighted circle, bowed and waited for his host to observe the proprieties.

Joss spoke up. "Our new guest would be grateful to hear conversation in his native tongue. Perhaps if you could all introduce yourself –"

All the Englishmen and women seemed fairly well conversant in French, judging by their opening remarks, and Saint-Ex breathed a sigh of relief. There was nothing worse than being marooned among a group of non-Francophones. The names of the women stayed easily with him, and he knew those of the men would come eventually.

A servant approached with a glass. Saint-Ex, no foe of a friendly drink himself, his large frame able to surround litres of wine with no apparent diminution of sobriety, took it willingly and sipped moderately to wet his pipes. Now, since there was no time to lose, he would immediately broach his mission.

"Friends, citizens of this sad new world we now inhabit, I have made the perilous trip to your hospitable land because I heard rumours that your brave colony was less devastated than other realms by this hideous doom that has swept the globe. How happy I am to see that this one time Dame Rumour did not lie! Now, having found each other, all the components of civilization's resurrection have come together. In me, you see a humble man with a certain vision – a vision borrowed from one of your own countryman's prophetic volumes! I come as the bearer of a plan that will impose order on the chaos now churning around us. In you, I see a cadre of men and women at the peak of their powers, the fruit of Western enlightenment and education, heirs to the grand tradition of two millennia, holders of vast territories, commanders of large forces of loyal natives. Together, between us, we have the power and the will to raise the world up Lazarus-like from its grave!

"Let me start to detail what we must do. First –"

"Show us a card trick!"

Saint-Ex peered into the circle of faces. Several people were stifling yawns. The woman called Kiki had actually nodded off.

"Who said that?"

The puppyish youth who had named himself "Lizzie" thrust his hand up like an eager schoolchild and said, "I confess! That was me! It's simply that I heard Saint-Ex was famous for his card tricks."

"It is true, I am capable of extraordinary feats of leg-erdemain with an ordinary deck of playing cards –"

"Bring them out!" "Let's see some *new* tricks!" "I'll be his assistant!" "Hussy! You will not!" "Ladies, ladies, please – remember the last time!"

The uproar had awakened Kiki. "I have to visit the little girl's room," she said languorously. "Who else wants to come?" She and Alice de Trafford left, arm in arm.

A servant was standing by Saint-Ex, proffering a sealed deck on a silver salver. Automatically, Saint-Ex took it up.

"Very well. But only a few..."



Two hours later, his brain spinning from the diabolical pinkies, Saint-Ex found himself reclining at his full

length of six feet two inches, with his head resting on *Things to Come*, which in turn rested in the lap of Kiki Preston, who had returned after a 15-minute absence considerably enlivened and wide-eyed, chafing the inside of one elbow.

"Time to play 'Blow the Feather!'" called out Lady Idina during a momentary lull in the roistering.

Kiki leapt up, letting Saint-Ex's head thump to the zebra-hide rug. Unperturbed, he rolled over on his side to observe.

A bedsheet was brought out and unfolded. Kneeling in a rough circle, the party-goers took up the sheet by its edges, holding it at chest-level. A feather was deposited in the middle of the snowy expanse. Immediately, everyone began to purse their lips and puff. The feather fluttered erratically across the terrain while the players shrieked and laughed. Eventually the feather wafted up to settle on one woman's shoulder.

A hush fell. Lady Idina put a finger to her lips as if in deep contemplation. "Patricia Bowles," she plummily pronounced. "Now, who haven't you been paired with lately? Let me see.... Ah, I have it! June Carberry!"

The players applauded as June and Patricia stood, clasped hands and kissed.

"Take the Ostrich Bedroom, dears. Now, let's resume –"

Saint-Ex had been slow to perceive the reality of the game, befuddled as he was with drink. But when understanding dawned, he was outraged. Leaping to his feet, he transfixed the crowd with an outstretched finger.

"What decadence! Have you no shame? The world is emptying its veins into the gutter, and you amuse yourself thus? I – cannot –"

Dizziness suddenly overtook him, fatigue, wounds and drink conspiring. His collar and shirtfront seemed to tighten, and he felt himself beginning to fall backwards, consciousness departing down a whirlpool coloured, of all shades, pink.



Once more Saint-Ex awoke, this time with a throbbing skull. He kept his eyes closed against the bright sunlight he vaguely sensed beyond his lids.

"Here, old chap. Try some of this. It'll help in a jif."

Saint-Ex risked a look. He found himself outstretched on a sofa in a room littered with discarded clothing, empty glasses, half-eaten food and a pool of vomit. Seated near his ankles was Joss Erroll, looking dapper and unruffled despite the previous evening and his currently bare legs, puffing on a cigarette and offering a drink.

Whatever the liquid was, it could only improve his condition. Saint-Ex took and quaffed the beverage. True to Joss's promise, he felt quickly enlivened. The scent of his host's cigarette even reawakened that old lust in Saint-Ex, and he asked, "Have you a smoke to share?"

"Indeed. Genuine Craven 'A's. Enjoy it, for soon we shan't see their like again in our lifetimes."

Saint-Ex swung his legs down so as to sit upright. His white tuxedo was blotched with various stains. "*M'sieur* Erroll, you seem like the most sensible and civic-minded person in this madhouse –"

Joss waved a negligent hand, scrawling a line of smoke in the air. "Tut-tut, it's all appearances. It only comes from breeding and hereditary responsibility. I am

the Lord High Constable of Scotland after all. Although since practically every other royal is dead, I just might qualify as King of England too, for all I know."

"Scotland. That would explain—"

Joss lifted the hem of his kilt, revealing a traditional absence of undergarments. "Do you like the clan colours? I find them fetching."

"*M'sieur* Erroll, please! Can we discourse not like children, but like grown men? One cannot remain a little boy forever, after all, as charming as such a destiny might seem. And after all, I have not journeyed thousands of miles simply to re-enact the court life of Louis the 16th! I have a plan to rebuild civilization, and I am counting on you as local leader to assist me."

Joss smiled ruefully. "I'm afraid I'm not much of a leader here, Tonio. Not that my fellow settlers consent much to be led anyway. Lord Delamere and his wife, Gwladys — she's mayor of Nairobi, by the by — are more in that line."

Saint-Ex shot to his feet. "It's they I must see then! We must begin at once to assemble Wings Over the World!"

"I'm not quite sure what you intend, Tonio. But if it has anything to do with flying, you can rule it right out."

"Rule it out? But why?"

"Gwladys has issued an edict banning flying, in order to conserve fuel for our land vehicles. No one's making any more of it, after all. Or if they are, they're not delivering it to us. Why, there hasn't been a plane aloft in months. That's why we were so surprised to see yours."

Saint-Ex spluttered. "But, but — this is idiotic! Aviation is the key to restoring civilization. Without it, we shall revert to savagery!" His eye fell on *Things to Come*, its cover warping from having absorbed a spilled drink. Saint-Ex picked up his cherished volume, now fragrant with alcohol. "Look, the whole answer is in here! Your own H. G. Wells outlined this entire scenario four years ago, before any of it began. I met the man once myself — in London, with Korda — and I tell you he was a genius! True, there was no war, as he predicted, but that was only because the plague came first. Hitler was obviously ready towards the end to invade his neighbours. It was only the mass dying that disrupted his plans."

Joss grew reflective. "Ah, yes. Having one's soldiers and civilians and politicians, as well as those of one's enemy, turn into leaky sacks of blood and melted organs is a rather effective deterrent to bellicosity. Shame no one ever thought of trying it before. Say — would you care to hear my theory why we Africanized Kenyan whites were as relatively immune as the natives?"

Saint-Ex was brought up short. "Why, yes, I would."

"Basically, we had already been immunized, just as the niggers were. This country, you see, boasts black-water fever, malaria, dysentery, cholera, typhoid, bubonic plague and sleeping sickness, just to name a few charming microbial predators. Having already survived those, we had a measure of protection against the nameless haemorrhagic flux."

Saint-Ex recalled his own bouts with many diseases, both African, Asian and South American. "It makes as much sense as any other theory I have encountered. But do you not see," said the flier with increasing vehemence, "that such a stroke of good fortune demands even more of you? The rescue of the world sits squarely

on your shoulders!"

"Tonio, this lot here — and I fully include myself — have spent 20 years living out their most morbid and self-indulgent fantasies like pashas in the lap of luxury. They had no interest in contributing to the empire when it actually existed. Why should they exert themselves to revive it? Like flogging a dead horse, isn't it?"

"I refuse to believe that everyone shares this attitude! I will scour this land until I find people capable of great deeds and selfless action!"

Joss yawned. "Now you begin to sound like old Beryl —"

"Beryl? Not Beryl Markham? But I thought she was still in America —"

"Well, if she is, there's a damned good impostor living on her ranch at Njoro."

"*M'sieur* Erroll, you must lend me a car immediately."

"Haw! I think not, Tonio. You've already cost me a week's petrol just to fetch Doctor Vint. But you *are* welcome to a horse. Not one of the better ones, you understand. We reserve those for polo. But it'll be quite serviceable."

"But I have never ridden before!"

"Better get used to it, then. It's the wave of the future."

"Never! I reject such pessimism utterly!"

A woman's voice cried, "Bravo! Bravo!"

A barefoot, tousle-haired, pyjama-clad Kiki Preston stood in the doorway. "What spunk! What pep! Take me with you, Tony! Fly me to the moon, you gorilla, you!"

"What is she saying?" Saint-Ex asked his host.

Joss smiled. "I believe she is offering to be your copilot, or to fill some allied position."

"Can she fly?"

"No. But she owns a plane."

"Very good! Tell her she will soon have a chance to play her part."

"Not necessary. She always does anyway."



The lands surrounding Njoro were at 7,000 feet of elevation, on the Mau Escarpment: a mix of open, tall-grassed pastures and dense forests of junipers, acacia and mahogo. The air was cool and invigorating, the views equally so. To Saint-Ex's right, looking north, the land fell away to the ceaseless emerald swatch of the Rongai Valley, with the cobalt-coloured Molo Hills and the peak of the extinct volcano Menengai looming in the distance. It was like riding on the rim of a dish-garden of the gods.

None of this spectacular scenery, however, helped to alleviate Saint-Ex's aching buttocks and thighs. To the contrary, all the mocking beauty had put him in a foul mood. Irrepressibly loquacious, without any companions, he was reduced after nearly three days of solo travelling to complaining aloud.

"To think that I could have flown over this same distance in under an hour! I, who once thought nothing of soaring the length of the Andes! How are the mighty fallen! Not just I, of course, but the whole grand, scientific dream of the 20th century. Alas, what use in wishing things were different? Still, even the damned train would have been tolerable in comparison. But without spare parts, they fear to run it overmuch, debat-

ing every journey, quibbling and qualifying. Such indecision and cowardice! And to think that they are mankind's last best hope! If only the colonies of France had offered a better foundation, I would have headed there. Was I seduced by Wells's vision into unconsciously favouring the British? A nation of shopkeepers! Listen to me! What am I saying? Nations are dead, and only the brotherhood of the air now exists. In any case, my hand is now drawn, and I must play it...."

Noontime saw Saint-Ex crossing the border of cultivated lands planted in flax and ground maize. An hour later he came upon a well-established homestead, presumably Lord Delamere's estate. Gratitude overswept him, especially as his horse had begun to falter, favouring one leg.

"Curse all beasts of burden! Give me a sturdy, reliable machine any time!"

No white person was in sight, only natives moving with slow deliberation on errands and chores. Trying his French on them, Saint-Ex was met with total incomprehension. Reduced to simply asking for "Beryl Markham, Beryl Markham!" over and over, he eventually received pantomime directions that indicated he must ride some small distance further to find "Mem-sahib Beru."

Cursing, he urged his limping horse – an otherwise tractable mare ironically (and, he believed, precisely so chosen) named Winged Victory – onward.

After another 90 minutes (Delamere's holdings, Equator Ranch, constituted 160,000 acres, and Saint-Ex was cutting across a small corner of them), during which time he passed several Masai encampments, their beloved cattle lowing plaintively, Saint-Ex reached a second ranch, this time boasting both a sawmill and a flourmill. Further pantomime earned him directions towards the stables.

Rounding the corner of an outbuilding, Saint-Ex saw Beryl Markham – grey flannel pants, white blouse, brown denim jacket – standing with a western-dressed native outside the stalls.

Pangs of sexual longing in his loins began to compete with the pains of riding.

Beryl Markham was two years younger than Saint-Ex, born in 1902 to his 1900, and nearly as tall, grazing six feet. With her wavy blonde hair, flashing blue eyes, painted nails, slim figure, patrician features, and immense self-composure, she had often been compared to Garbo. Twice married, now separated from her second husband, scandalous ex-lover of Britain's Prince Henry, promiscuous as any man (as, say, Saint-Ex himself), she was fully as much a living legend as Saint-Ex knew himself to be.

The only white child on the ranch of Charles "Clutt" Clutterbuck, Beryl Clutterbuck had been raised by a busy farming father more known for his extravagant affection than his daily attention. Left to her own devices, she had been practically adopted by the respectful natives, growing up like a wild creature, roaming the forests and plains, spear in hand, panga blade at her waist, pack of dogs by her side. Upon reaching adulthood, she had cast about rather aimlessly for a career before falling in love with flying, inducted and trained by another superb pilot, Tom Black. Achieving her unrestricted licence in record time, she was soon

overflying the bush, spotting elephants for white hunters such as Bror Blixen and Denys Finch Hatton (both ex-lovers). On a whim one day she set out solo for England, in a plane whose most advanced instrumentation was a compass and altimeter. It took her seven exhausting days to get there, and when she arrived she borrowed some evening clothes and went dancing at the Savoy.

Then, in 1936, in an aircraft borrowed from the very John Carberry Saint-Ex had just met at Naivasha, its cockpit nearly filled with jury-rigged fuel tanks, she had set a world record, the first woman to fly alone and non-stop from England to North America. (Her goal had been to land in New York, but she had crashed in a Newfoundland bog. To the two fishermen who had found the bloodied aviator, she had calmly introduced herself: "I'm Mrs Markham, and I've just flown from England.")

All this and much more Saint-Ex knew about Beryl, thanks to a continuing interest manifested in a long correspondence, much like that he had carried on with Anne Lindbergh. Although Saint-Ex had met Beryl only once in person, in 1932 at the King's Cup air races in England.

But that one meeting had impressed her image and essence on his heart. Beryl was his dream woman, both physically and in her character, unattached and available. Yet in 1932, married to Consuelo only a year, Saint-Ex had felt it unchivalrous to start an affair so soon, although Beryl had given signs of not being averse. (And what irony, Saint-Ex thought, since his new bride – wild, capricious, hot-blooded Latin that she was – had begun to cuckold *him* not much later.) For years, although their paths had not crossed again, Saint-Ex kept abreast of his female counterpart's exploits, both through news reports and her own well-written letters.

And now, here they met at last once more in the miraculously spared flesh, amidst the ruins of the globe!



Saint-Ex raised a hand in a friendly wave, catching the eye of the native. The man tugged at Beryl's sleeve, she turned to take in the sight of the approaching visitor. Then from nowhere there sprouted a pistol in her hand, and she called forcefully, "Get off that poor horse, you fool, or I'll drill your black heart!"

Saint-Ex understood a bit more English than he let on (pretend ignorance was a useful ruse at times). But such a situation was rather easily interpreted in any event. He reined his horse to a dead stop, then wearily dropped to the ground.

Beryl advanced with that peculiar, sexy, ball-of-the-foot lope of hers that she had learned from the Nandi hunters. "You damned idiot, riding a horse in that condition! Do you want to cripple it for life! I swear, I—"

The angry woman, now only feet from Saint-Ex, stopped dead, gun dropping to the turf, her face transforming from wrath to joy. "Tonio! Can it really be you! I thought you were dead!"

"Only a moment more and I might have been," said Saint-Ex dryly.

Beryl hurled herself into his arms. "Oh, Tonio, you *know* I would have bestowed only a flesh wound for such relatively minor mistreatment of a horse." Mention of the mare caused Beryl to turn her attention to

the animal. Rapidly and intuitively assessing its condition, she issued a stream of instructions in his language to her native assistant, who bowed and led the horse away.

"Arap Ruta, my brother, will see that she fully recovers."

"Your brother?"

"We were raised together, Ruta and I. There's more of a bond between us than I share with most of my other blood relatives."

"And what of them?" asked Saint-Ex delicately.

Beryl seemed unperturbed by the question, and delivered her answer plainly, without emotion. "Mother and Richard were in England, of course, where they'd been for ages. They were never here long enough to develop immunity to the flux, I believe. They can only be dead. Gervase and his father, the same. Clutt, thank goodness, is safe in South Africa. One of the last steamers brought a letter from him."

"Your situation is identical to mine," Saint-Ex grew solemn for a moment, considering all the dead, his own and those millions unknown to him. Beryl used the silent interval to size up the bearish Frenchman with flashing eyes, before he spoke again. "Do you still have your plane, Beryl my sweet?"

"Of course! And a field to launch it from! Not that it does me much good, with this fuel embargo old Gwladys has imposed. Would you care to see it?"

"By all means!"

Beryl conducted her guest to a long grassy landing strip where sat her pride and joy: a streamlined Vega Gull identical to the one she had piloted across the Atlantic.

"Isn't she a beauty! Stingy old Carberry had to buy a new one when I ruined the first. You should have heard him swear! But he's given up flying since the collapse, and he signed her over to me. I've christened her *The Messenger II*. She's got a 200-horsepower De Havilland Gipsy Six engine, and variable-pitch props. Cruises at over 160!"

Saint-Ex ran his hand admiringly over the fuselage. "A beauty. Like her glamorous owner, she is a combination of—"

Startled by the sudden appearance of a boy's white face in the cockpit window, Saint-Ex pulled back. "Who is that?"

Beryl laughed. "Oh, that's just Jimmy. His own parents died of the flux. They had just been transferred here by the husband's company from Shanghai, and evidently hadn't benefited yet from our salubrious climate. Nice couple, the Ballards, but that didn't save them. Somehow, Jimmy ended up with me. He must be a natural immune, or a mooncalf favoured by the gods. He's nearly the same age my own Gervase would have been, and I suppose I was feeling maternal. Lord knows, it's a rare enough emotion with me. Here, you should meet him."

Beryl opened the cockpit door. "Jimmy, come out please." She turned to Saint-Ex. "I should warn you, he's rather a strange child, especially since his parents' deaths. Doesn't speak much. All he cares to do really is sit behind the controls of the plane and pretend to fly."

A gawky, long-limbed youngster in shorts and striped shirt cautiously emerged. He had the look of a hunted



animal or visitor from another world. Saint-Ex squatted before the boy, and proceeded magically to pluck coins, pencils and other unlikely objects from behind his ears. Smiling with grave dignity, Jimmy submitted to the game, but it was clear his mind was elsewhere.

After Jimmy had been allowed to return to his fantasy flight, Beryl and Saint-Ex headed back to the main house.

"I can offer you plenty to eat, as long as you don't mind tommie meat—"

"No, I have tried it once already, and find gazelle quite palatable, if accompanied by a decent wine."

Beryl laughed. "Good, good! We've a fine cellar. And there'll be a hot bath waiting for you, as well as fresh clothes." For the first time, a slight note of constrained hysteria crept into Beryl's strong voice. "Nothing like a plague to ensure plenty of hand-me-downs for the survivors, after all." She visibly pulled back from some private abyss, regaining her easy tone. "Then, when you're washed and fed, we shall drink and laugh and talk ourselves silly, reminiscing about old times! It's been so long, Tonio, so long...."

Saint-Ex took her hand. "I agree, my flower, with one condition. That we shall also speak of the future."

"Oh, Tonio, you scare me, but it feels good!"

"How so?"

"It's been so long since I could imagine any of us had such a thing as a future!"



After the meal with its wine accompaniment and brandy chasers, Beryl and Saint-Ex switched to pinkies, delivered to them in the candle-lit, trophy-hung parlour by a sombre and discreet Arap Ruta. With a crackling fire pushing back the evening cold of the Highlands, cigarette smoke curling into the rafters, the two aviators soon found themselves deep in easy and animated conversation, dissecting personalities and events of olden days.

Beryl tossed one arm backward in a dramatic gesture. "So then Bunny says to Petal, if it's good enough for Cockie and Sonny, then who the hell is Hemingway to bitch!"

Saint-Ex laughed heartily. Beryl was a vivid storyteller.

"Did you ever consider putting your adventures down in print, Beryl dear?"

She swirled her drink. "Like you? Oh, I suppose I've briefly contemplated it now and then. Karen Blixen was going to help me at one point, but then there was that awful scandal and she left for Denmark for good. I still miss her. I often speculate that she's still alive. After all, she was resident here from 1914 on, so she should have picked up our miraculous resistance. Perhaps we'll meet again someday, just as you and I have.... Anyway, I had even come up with a title: *West with the Night*. Evocative, don't you think? But I was never as serious about writing as you seem to be. I thought of it mostly when I was desperate for funds!"

"My own main spur for composition! But it is not too late, you know. In fact, I am working on a new manuscript myself." Saint-Ex indicated one of his satchels. "Something very different, a child's fable."

"Now you are carrying optimism too far, Tonio! Who's

going to print this book or read it? Such civilized amenities are extinct."

"Come now, Beryl! You exaggerate tremendously! Humanity has been in much worse fixes than this. Take the Middle Ages, for instance."

"You take them. I myself prefer Paris around 1925."

"As who does not! But my point is that life will go on. And it will unroll much more smoothly with our help."

Saint-Ex stood and fetched his satchel, from which he withdrew *Things to Come*. "Here, you must read this. Immediately, without delay."

"Oh, Tonio, I'm too smashed—"

"Read it, Beryl. Or I am gone."

Huffing prettily, Beryl took the book and drew a candle closer. With melodramatic motions, she opened the book and turned the pages. Soon, however, she was reading with real interest, plainly captivated.

Just as he had so often done while waiting for friends to finish reading his own first drafts, Saint-Ex paced the room dramatically, smoking and drinking.

Two hours later, Beryl set the book down. Tears welled from her blue eyes. "I don't know what to say. It's all so true and tragic, yet fanciful and hopeful at the same time. To think he saw it all coming. What a genius! That speech of Mary's — 'This nightmare of a world we live in — that is the dream, that is what will pass away.' If only it could be true...."

Saint-Ex fell to his knees before Beryl, taking both her hands in his. "But it *can* be, Beryl! Together, you and I and the other pilots in Kenya can become Wings over the World! A new breed of sane men and women! We only need to *will* it for it to be so!"

They were kissing then, frantically, tongues and mouths on each other like thirst-stricken desert travellers face-first in an oasis spring. Beryl ripped the shirt from Saint-Ex's back, and he whipped her cloth belt out of its loops, gripped the hem of her trousers and pulled them off, upending her onto the couch, much as he was wont to whisk tablecloths from under dishes, but with less grace. Beryl leaped up and tackled Saint-Ex, bringing him crashing to the floor. She was atop him, pinning him down one-handed while wriggling out of her step-ins, then popping the buttons off her own shirt.

"Mother of God, girl! You are a savage!"

"You're not the first to tell me that! And you won't be the last! Now, get those flannels off!"

Saint-Ex felt it wisest to comply.

Then talk ceased.

They finished coupled like spoons. Saint-Ex felt every minute of his extra two years and the additional crashes he held over Beryl. When his breathing had slowed and he opened his eyes, he was confronted with a set of old faded scars on Beryl's back he had been too busy to notice earlier. Tracing them, he asked, "What are these from, pretty one?"

Sleepily, Beryl replied, "Paddy, the Elkington's pet lion. When I was ten, he attacked me."

"What a horror! And were you scared?"

"Of course not, silly. Clutt was nearby. And besides, I had already killed one myself by then."



Nairobi, at lower elevations, was much warmer than the White Highlands. Standing outside the Muthaiga

Country Club in the hot sunlight, sweat speckling his face, chocolate-coloured dust kicked up by the horse-drawn vehicles that rumbled by tickling his nose, Saint-Ex felt stifled in his formal wear.

"Beryl – is it strictly necessary that I wear this monkey suit? You know my preference for informal attire."

"Do you think I'm any happier in this getup in the middle of the day? But if we want to get Lord and Lady Delamere on our side, we can't afford to look like a couple of mechanics! Now, straighten your bowtie and we'll go in."

Saint-Ex did as he was told. This seemed to be the new pattern of his behaviour around Beryl, since their intimate reunion nine days ago. Used to giving orders to friends and subordinates alike, comfortable mostly when leading and directing both recreations and missions, Saint-Ex found that a certain amount of tongue-biting was necessary in their relationship. He kept telling himself that he was not on familiar ground, and that Beryl knew best. But at times he wanted to bull ahead, tossing aside her subtle machinations. (Beryl's second, non-savage self was fully at home in the intricately mannered colonial milieu, very much a wily player).

This meeting with Lord and Lady Delamere seemed one such move. As Beryl had explained back at Njoro, before their long wearisome horse-ride into the city, "Nothing gets done in Kenya without Uncle Hughie's approval. And Uncle Hughie does nothing without consulting Gwladys. She's a nettlesome one, though! Much younger than Uncle Hughie – his second wife in fact. And she's not a patch on Aunt Florence, God rest her soul."

"Are you truly related to the Delameres?"

"Not by blood. But I've known Uncle Hughie since I was three. He and Aunt Florence were awfully good to Clutt and me, and I've trained Uncle's racehorses for a decade now. I can wrap him around my little finger. Gwladys, however is another story. But since she has a penchant for virile, adventurous men, she'll be your assignment."

"You flatter me, Beryl."

"Oh, don't try to kid me, Mister Saint-Ex! I know your notorious ways with the ladies perfectly well. And don't think I won't have my eye on your every move from here on in!"

"And a more charming eye one could not imagine."

"Now who is flattering whom, hey?"

The Muthaiga Country Club, a sprawling, multi-winged, partly colonnaded structure, was comprised of huge stone blocks covered with pink pebbledash and surrounded by a golf course, squash courts and croquet lawns. It was the buzzing social centre of Nairobi social life, a hive where one could easily be stung to death.

Standing now on its doorstep, Saint-Ex braced himself for his assault on the Queen Bee.

Beryl was greeting an employee in English. "Hullo, Philip. This is my guest, Mr Saint-Exupery."

"Not a Jew by any chance, is he?"

Saint-Ex understood the question. "A Jew? With the fabric of the world rotting around us, he wonders if I am a Jew! This is insane! And what if I were? Were the flying abilities of my good friend Jean Israel any less because he had his dick clipped! I cannot believe this!"

Philip smiled approvingly. "Your friend seems the

excitable type. He'll fit right in. Have a nice meal, Mrs Markham."



Beryl took Saint-Ex's arm and shepherded him through the busy, cool interior of the club, with its cream and green walls and parquet floors. Saint-Ex noted a few familiar faces from the Djinn Palace, dotted among the many strange ones: the Carberrys, the Errolls, Kiki Preston. The latter, catching sight of Saint-Ex, semaphored extravagantly to him, causing Beryl to cast a cold glance Kiki's way. Saint-Ex smiled, Beryl harumphed, and they turned their backs towards her.

All the guests were impeccably attired, Saint-Ex noted, just as if nothing in the world had changed, and he felt a sudden sense of unreality, unable to reconcile this wilfully ignorant finery with the carnage he had witnessed in his escape from the charnel grounds of the Continent. The feeling passed, leaving him sour-souled.

"Tonio, you were much too vehement with Philip. It's true he's just a servant, but you must rein yourself in. Remember our mission."

"Very well, very well! But when Air Command is running things, we shall insist on and enforce liberty, fraternity and equality!"

"Let us crawl before we try to run, though."

In the dining room, Beryl steered straight for a certain table with two diners seated. Once there, she introduced Saint-Ex.

"Lord Delamere, may I present the famous French aviator, Antoine, Count de Saint-Exupery."

Saint-Ex was embarrassed by the use of his title, but tried not to show it. He stuck out his hand for Lord Delamere. The man stood, a small, once-muscular fellow, with homely, wizened face and bald pate, and addressed Beryl first.

"Beryl, you scamp! How dare you take any time off from training my nags! How will I sweep Race Week if you continue so slothful? Well, I'm glad to see you anyway. You look damn fine! You're poured into that dress like oats into a feedbag!"

Lord Delamere turned his attention on Saint-Ex, taking his hand with seemingly genuine enthusiasm. "Glad you could escape that mess back on the Continent, lad. Kenya needs all the good white men it can get, if we're to keep on top of things."

Beryl translated. Saint-Ex replied, "I am glad to hear you speak so, Lord Delamere, as this is my very purpose in coming to Africa."

"And this is Gwladys, Lady Delamere, Mayor of Nairobi."

Saint-Ex turned to confront a woman in her early 40s. Pale-skinned, dark-haired, petulant and puffy-faced, half again as massive as her elderly husband, she was a once-attractive woman gone to mental and physical seed.

Taking her offered hand, Saint-Ex planted a kiss on it. "Such a combination of managerial skill and beauty does not seem strictly fair to the rest of the daughters of Eve."

Lady Delamere giggled, and Saint-Ex could tell she had already been drinking for some time. "What a charmer! I hope you will not keep yourself secluded at Njoro entirely, Count."

Saint-Ex fought a grimace. "Certainly not now, that I have seen the attractions of Nairobi."

Lady Delamere tittered again, and Saint-Ex visualized, improbably, a drunken frog.

The newcomers sat, and the meal commenced with Lord Delamere bellowing out to the Somali staff, "Boy! More champagne!"

During the fish course, Saint-Ex could contain himself no longer and began to discuss business. He outlined his dream of Wings Over the World, stressing its British origin.

"And Kenya is ideally fitted to provide the nucleus of such a force. I believe that this country boasts more planes and living pilots than any other in the world."

Lord Delamere banged a withered fist on the table. "Yes, but what of the petrol situation, damn it! We've barely enough for rudimentary ground transport, let alone gallivanting through the clouds! Where are you going to get your bloody fuel!"

Saint-Ex tried to speak as convincingly as he could, dividing his gaze between husband and wife. "There are depots here and there which we could commandeer. I stopped at one such at Malakal on the way here. But the ultimate answer is the one Wells foresaw. He placed the headquarters of his Air Command at Basra, amidst the refineries and oil deposits. We must do the same."

"What are you getting at exactly?" Lady Delamere asked.

Saint-Ex leaned forward. "I am asking you for enough petrol to get to Basra and back. This first flight shall be a simple reconnaissance mission. I suspect that the facilities lie unattended, ours for the plucking. If there are Arabs present, possible survivors of the plague, they will surely welcome the reimposition of European rule. I know the Arabs, have lived among them and speak their language. We will need them, in fact, to run the refineries and wells. We will mount a larger mission upon my return, establishing full control, a secure beachhead from which to resurrect the world. Soon, you will have all the petrol you need. Kenya, the new global capital, will flourish as never before!"

Lady Delamere seemed dubious. "I don't know, it all seems so chancy. What if you meet some kind of opposition...?"

Saint-Ex took the Mayor's hands in his. "Gwladys, I promise you, it will be a piece of cake! I stake my name on it! What do you have to lose?"

"Well, I suppose it's a small enough gamble. We can spare a few hundred gallons of fuel. We'll just have to cut back on the safaris a bit, I suppose. Don't you agree, Hugh?"

Under the influence of the bubbly, Lord Delamere had been growing visibly sleepy. Beryl gripped the drowsy man's elbow and shook him gently. "Uncle Hughie—"

The results of this intervention were dramatic. Lord Delamere rocketed to his feet. From a holster beneath his jacket he produced a Colt.32 pistol.

"Fuzzy-wuzzies, you say!? Where are they? Loose the hounds!"

Fixating on his own movements in the mirror behind the long bar across the room, Lord Delamere raised his gun. With a *sang-froid* that bespoke similar occurrences in the past, the bartenders dropped below the thick

mahogany counter. Just in time, for Lord Delamere began to fire. He took out several liquor bottles and a rack of cocktail glasses before Beryl could gently and efficiently subdue him. The inebriated estate-holder and Founding Father of white Kenya sank sleepily down again into his overstuffed chair.

Saint-Ex was amazed at the unconcern exhibited by the other patrons of the Muthaiga. What kind of lunatics had he cast his lot with?

Lady Delamere took a long sip of champagne, then said, "I think you've roused Lord Delamere's sense of adventure, Count. At least it wasn't as bad as the time he doused the club's piano with paraffin and set it afire. Still, he'll be rather a handful for the next few days. Despite that, I shall send a tanker truck out to Njoro with the fuel tomorrow."



Dressed in comfortable, rumpled dirty coveralls, head under a raised cowl on Beryl's Vega Gull, his arms smeared with grease to the elbows, Saint-Ex felt as relaxed as he ever did while still standing on the ground. And what made his joy as complete as it could be was that beside him, similarly busy and likewise accoutered, stood Beryl herself, his long-sought life's mate, the woman whom only a strange, world-wrenching twist of fate had made his.

Beryl pulled out from beneath the raised hinged metal engine cover, her face streaked with shiny black. "Done! What about you?"

"*Moi aussi, ma chère.*"

"Let's eat, then. I'm famished!"

Sitting beneath the wing-shade cast by the fully fuelled plane, they ate their fruit and sandwiches quietly for a time, then enjoyed a reflective smoke, before Beryl spoke.

"You know, I always believed that the important, the exciting changes in one's life took place at some cross-road of the world where people met and built high buildings and traded the things they made and laughed and laboured and clung to their whirling civilization like beads on the skirt of a dervish. Everybody was breathless in the world I imagined. Everybody moved to hurried music that I never expected to hear. I never yearned for it much. It had a literary and unattainable quality, like my childhood remembrance of Scheherazade's Baghdad. And now that world is gone, dead as Scheherazade herself. And you and I find ourselves on this elevated scrap of earth, where one would expect only commonplace things to emerge. And instead, we very well might be the Adam and Eve of a new world."

Saint-Ex took Beryl's hand tenderly. "Ah, my sweet, how glad I am to share this common and disinterested ideal with one such as you. Truly, you have learned Life's lesson, that love does not consist in gazing solely at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction."

"Well, I do think this great work we are attempting is wonderful and exciting. Of course, it's also our obvious responsibility, especially since we aviators were the cause of all this misery—"

At first Saint-Ex could literally not parse this last thought. It seemed like the sheerest gibberish. When its surface meaning penetrated, he still could not

fathom what Beryl meant.

Spying his confusion, Beryl said, "Surely you have heard the theory before, Tonio. I think it quite the most likely. The haemorrhagic flux obviously originated here in Africa. This is evident from the patterns of immunity. The disease must have existed in equilibrium with its environment for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. In the early days of settlement, it couldn't travel far. Its victims just died too soon to spread it. It was only when air travel became routine that the virus was enabled to hopscotch around the globe. We spread it, Tonio! All of us in the bright brotherhood of aviators, ferrying infected passengers. We killed all those millions, Tonio, as surely as if we had mowed them down personally with machine guns."

Saint-Ex felt something shatter within him. Without willing it, he was on his feet. Beryl rose too and hugged him to her.

"There, there, Tonio, it hit me hard too the first time. But you can't let the knowledge paralyze you. No one living has hands unbloodied. We're just unprecedentedly bloodier than most. The only way we can atone, even partially, is to keep on doing what we're doing."

Finding his tongue, which felt like a wheel chock, Saint-Ex said, "All – all my life I have despised war and killing. And now I learn I am one of the biggest murderers ever to live. This – this will take some growing into, Beryl."

"Precisely, dear. So let's get growing."



Beryl's clear voice rang out from inside the plane at dawn. "Switches on! Contact!"

An experienced Arap Ruta spun the prop and jumped back. There came a splutter, a strangled cough like the premature stirring of a sleep-slugged labourer. Then the full roar of the mighty engine as Beryl throttled up.

The Messenger II began to taxi down the short Njoro airstrip. The green marge of brush rushed at them with astonishing speed, until, with only inches to spare, the four-seater was aloft.

Inside the cockpit, Saint-Ex turned to Beryl – looking exceedingly attractive in her signature gear of fur-trimmed leather jacket, white silk shirt, cravat and flowing white trousers – and said, "Very nice takeoff, my sweet. A true example of flying *a l'oeil et a la fesse*."

"I don't recognize the idiom, Tonio."

"Ah, let me see – 'by the cloth of one's trousers...?'"

"Seat of the pants?"

"Oui, c'est vrai!"

Behind the couple were stacked various supplies for their trip, mostly boxes of food, water, medicines and ammunition, all covered with a tarp. Their voyage was to be broken in half: 1200 miles to Aden, where hopefully refuelling would be possible; then a second leg of equal length to Basra. Total estimated travel time, one-way: 15 to 20 hours. Eminently do-able by one toughened pilot of the old school, decidedly easy for two.

Although Saint-Ex detested the co-pilot's chair – he experienced headaches aloft if he were not in supreme control – he had deferred out of chivalry and love and sheer rights of ownership to Beryl when it came to takeoff. Now, his hands itching to grasp the controls, he tried to concentrate instead on the landscape below as

they climbed to their cruising height of 3,000 feet.

Yesterday's revelation, that in all probability the global plague had been spread by the activities of dedicated, technophilic, fatally ignorant men like himself, still smouldered within him like the remnants of a funeral pyre. What would Wells have thought? Saint-Ex knew it would take many days and many deeds before he would ever possibly assuage the sense of guilt.

And yet, up in the air once again, Saint-Ex found it hard to be too morose. With such a stalwart companion beside him, one possessed of *debrouillardise* (the ineffable "right stuff" of a true pilot), with a clear mission, a fine craft, the elements placid, the vistas broad – How could any vigorous man feel blue?

Casting his eye around the cramped compartment (when Beryl had flown in this plane's duplicate across the Atlantic, jury-rigged fuel tanks had filled all space except for a tiny pilot's niche), Saint-Ex spotted the butt of a pistol sticking from a door-pocket.

"Beryl, I don't recall packing this. Our rifles, yes, but not this weapon...."

"Oh, no, that's just part of the *Messenger's* standard equipment. It's for the ants."

"The ants?"

"Do you know the *sansevieria*? A waste of weeds that jut up like an endless crop of sabres near the coast? A crash landing there skewers your plane, and if you're very lucky you die too. Otherwise, you face the *siafu*. Innocent little red ants, half the length of a matchstick. Within a few hours, a horde of them will have a healthy horse slaughtered and half-consumed."

"But I don't see how the gun –"

Beryl fixed him with her steely gaze, and Saint-Ex said, "Oh, of course. Quite proper."

For many miles afterward they were silent, rapt in the dream of flight. Slipped from the trammels of the world, surrounded by a bubble of noise and cloven slipperiness, mundane reality fallen away, they were as eagles. Only a few hours from home, they were already as distant from it as if they were in India, or on an asteroid whirling amongst the stars. Below them, vast herds grazed or raced, as if exulting in mankind's premature demise.

Soon, Saint-Ex's stomach – which he was never loath to pamper, when duty permitted – commenced to rumble. "Beryl, dear, with your permission I believe I shall break into our provisions –"

Lifting high a corner of the tarp, Saint-Ex was astounded to confront the squint-eyed face of a young boy.

"The sun," said Jimmy Ballard with a scowl. "It's too bright –"

"Jimmy!" exclaimed Beryl, momentarily nonplussed. "What *could* you have been *thinking*!"

Jimmy smiled in his abstracted way. "I wanted to see where the dreams come from."

"This is untenable," Saint-Ex pronounced. "Not only does it throw off our fuel calculations, but the danger –"

Beryl seemed less disagreeable to their stowaway. "Oh, Tonio, come off it. You know you would have done the same thing at his age if you had had the chance. As for the fuel, we have a margin of tolerance. And the danger – well, where *isn't* there danger these days?"

Saint-Ex fumed for a while, but eventually managed

to reconcile himself to the new situation.



Now the flight assumed a monotony of forward motion that gave the illusion of a fixed vehicle above a spinning ball of a world. Trading off duties, Beryl and Saint-Ex stayed fresh right up until the midpoint of their journey, the aerodrome at Aden. Intimately familiar with the landing facilities there from his Aeropostale days, Saint-Ex assumed the controls for touchdown. With nose high to insure that the tail wheel touched ground first, they made a perfect descent. Taxiing up to the refuelling station, Saint-Ex breathed a sigh of relief at the seemingly uninhabited conditions at the once-bustling aerodrome. (Although the many scattered desiccated and half-eaten corpses were not exactly pleasant.)

At the pumps the three fliers disembarked, the adults armed, Beryl with rifle and Saint-Ex with ant-gun tucked into his waistband. A vast inhuman silence broken only by the exhalations and twitterings of nature reigned. It left Saint-Ex feeling mournful. After stretching their limbs, Beryl stood guard, Jimmy poked around, and Saint-Ex manually pumped their tanks full.

"Jimmy! Stay away from those dead men!"

"But Aunt Beryl, I just wanted to see the smiles beneath their faces..."

As soon as their tanks were topped off, they were in the air again, with Saint-Ex at the controls. Now that they had left Beryl's stomping ground of Africa behind and were in Saint-Ex's domain of the Levant, he insisted on doing most of the actual piloting. Heading north across the ancient Mediterranean lands, the Frenchman felt as if he were Moses leading some rag-tag remnants of his people towards a promised haven.

They passed the tedious hours in various ways. Snacks were taken, catnaps snatched, and Saint-Ex introduced Beryl to the addictive "game of the six-letter words." Conversation turned both speculative and practical. Saint-Ex tried to interest Beryl in some of his most recent, pre-Collapse reading, the work of physicists Planck and de Broglie, their speculations on entropy and the quantum nature of spacetime, branching futures and all, but she found it too dry. In turn, she attempted to convey to him the excitement of horse-training, its scents and sensations, half a ton of flesh in motion, but discovered him likewise unexcited.

"Thank God we both like to fuck," she said drily.

"Beryl, please, the innocent child —"

Jimmy, however, was unheeding of their talk. Seated in Beryl's lap, hands on the decoupled dual controls, eyes riveted on cloud-sculptures, he was plainly flying them to a destination more exotic than Basra.



It was coming on dusk when they reached the head of the Persian Gulf, leaving water behind for land. Dropping below a thousand feet to gauge local conditions, Saint-Ex was pleased to see an absence of humanity. It appeared that Basra would be theirs for the taking.

Such sanguine forecasts, however, were soon revealed to be premature.

Below them, campfires came into view. Tethered horses clustered around Bedouin tents. The sound of the Vega Gull brought the occupants of the tents out

into the open. Shading their eyes with free hands, ancient carbines in the others, the groundlings soon spotted the plane.

"Ah, my old comrades, the tribes of the sands. Well do I recall their language and ways. Certainly their range has expanded since the days when I would host them in my room at Port Juby. Yet I venture to say they are as friendly now as then —"

Shots began to ring out. A bullet pinged off a strut.

"Yes, just as friendly."

Saint-Ex pulled back on the stick and the *Messenger* reared up like a stallion. Continuing north, they left the Arabs behind.

"I think they were saddling up," said Beryl.

"Ah, the follies of mankind. The one undeviating standard in a changing universe."

Saint-Ex insisted on completing their mission by overflying the refineries, despite the potential threat offered by the Arabs left to their rear. Miraculously, the installations appeared pristine, mankind's demise having been too rapid for social chaos, yet not so rapid as to preclude shutting down the plants in an orderly fashion.

"Here is the rock whereon I shall build my church," Saint-Ex declaimed grandiosely.

"Here is the rock on which you'll *crash*, unless we forget the speeches and fuel up soon, *mon vieux*."

Saint-Ex canted the plane around, and headed for the Basra aerodrome, soon setting them down neatly.

"I am not quite so familiar with this layout..."

Unlike the forgotten refineries, the airport had been the scene of much insane activity, as people sought madly and uselessly to flee. Here was much damage from the end times. It took them nearly an hour to find a workable pump and full reservoir. As Saint-Ex heaved away, Beryl kept a cocked ear.

"I hear hooves—"

Out of the twilight poured the *raffia* of ululating riders. Stepping out boldly into the open on the passenger's side of the plane, Beryl brought her rifle up to her shoulder with assurance and took out the lead rider with a single shot while he was still some distance away. The others wheeled about and retreated a few hundred yards. The dead man lay on the tarmac like a sack of wheat, while his mount galloped on by their plane.

"Keep pumping," ordered Beryl sternly.

"I was not planning to stop!"

By their shouted arguments, it was clear that the confused Bedouins were plainly working out some leadership problems. But they would not desist forever.

"Don't bother to fill the tanks, Tonio. Let's just get out of here!"

Saint-Ex hurriedly uncoupled hose from tank. He rushed to the pilot's side of the plane.

At that moment the Arabs charged, carbines blasting.

"Get in," urged Beryl. "I'll hold them off."

"No, I insist, after you, Alphonse!"

Beryl laughed, then turned to fire at the attackers. Golden hair streaming in the dusk breeze (Saint-Ex was automatically calculating takeoff vectors), she reminded the Frenchman of a Valkyrie. Drawing his pistol, Saint-Ex rushed to her side.

A bullet took Beryl in the shoulder and she yelped, spinning and falling.

Saint-Ex gave a wordless howl, raised his ant-gun

and squeezed the trigger.

A magnificent roar like the resurgence of the Red Sea after its parting filled his ears, and a cloud of bitter smoke engulfed him.

When his senses returned, Saint-Ex saw before him an astonishing sight. Two horses and their riders had been turned into partially ground hamburger, and the rest of the Arabs were grovelling on the macadam as if in the presence of their sacred Rock.

Saint-Ex stared incredulously at his pistol. Then he looked behind him.

Protruding from the plane's cabin were the enormous twin steaming barrels of a full-bore elephant gun, hefted by young Jimmy.

"They wanted to see heaven, and I let them," said the boy.

Without further hesitation, Saint-Ex hoisted Beryl quickly into the plane, then ran to its front.

"Jimmy! Help me!"

The boy slid willingly behind the controls. Saint-Ex spun the prop, the engine caught, and he scrambled in. Heedless of the living or the dead, he zipped down the runway and was quickly aloft.

Jimmy was cradling the unconscious woman's head in his lap. On her shoulder bloomed a greedy red rose.

"Will Aunt Beryl ever play with us again, Uncle Tonio?"

"We hope," said Saint-Ex in English. "We hope a lot."



The big balding man sat on a piano stool in the candle-illuminated parlour of the Djinn Palace. Barefoot, clad in Kenyan formal dinner pyjamas, he clutched in each massive hand an orange. Seated on his shoulders was a voluptuous woman wearing only her undergarments and high heels. She hefted a half-filled champagne bottle and a glass. Now pouring herself some, she sloppily dribbled some of the bubbly on the man's head. It ran down the side of his face and he darted out his tongue to catch the rill.

"*Tres bon!* Now, *attendez-vous!* Debussy!"

Using one orange for the black keys and one for the white, the man produced a surprisingly melodic mish-mash that indeed resembled minor Debussy.

The listening crowd applauded wildly. The man stood abruptly, as if to take a bow, nearly upsetting his rider, who shrieked, dropped her burdens and clutched the giant around his brow.

"I am blind! Who turned out the lights? Are we now to play Pin the tail *sur un ane*? Very well!"

The big man began to career around the room, arms extended, taking full advantage of his plight to grope all the women, none of whom made any serious move to avoid him, rather inserting themselves into his mad path.

Finally even his great strength faltered under the woman's weight, and he set her down on a tabletop. Spotting an empty couch, he hurled himself onto it with a noisy grunt.

"More wine! And bring me more shrimp! Shelled, *s'il vous plait!*"

A pair of bare hairy male legs materialized at the man's eye-level. He looked up to a familiar, world-weary face.

"I'm glad to see you finally enjoying yourself, Saint-Ex," said his host, Joss Erroll. "All work and no play

makes Jacques a dull boy."

"Ah, work," exclaimed Saint-Ex melodramatically. "Work does not exist any more. We are now in a final age of self-indulgence which even my childhood hero Baudelaire could never have imagined."

"And your dreams?" inquired Joss gently in a tone not entirely cynical.

"Gone with the snows of yesteryear. And good riddance."

"But," said Joss enigmatically, "atop a mountain peak – Kilimanjaro, perhaps – all the snows of yesteryear still remain." And he walked off.

"Pah!" said Saint-Ex. Resting an arm across his eyes and temporarily blinding himself again, he let his mind wander while he awaited the servants with his wine and food.

The flight back had been as arduous and nerve-racking as any in his experience, even including the three days from Paris to Africa. Once stable at a safe altitude, Saint-Ex had warily let Jimmy handle the controls for a moment while he attended to Beryl. Stripping her of jacket and shirt, he found the antique Arab bullet still lodged in the wound. Fearing to provoke renewed bleeding, he merely cleansed and dressed her torn flesh, then tried to make her comfortable with a blanket. Resuming the pilot's seat, he popped several tablets of Benzedrine, then settled in for the long haul.

By Aden, after a day and a half in the air without more than two hours' scattered sleep, he felt his mind crumbling. He dared not rest, for fear of Beryl's condition worsening. Somehow he refuelled and climbed into the skies once more.

By the end of the trip, it was only Jimmy's wordless crooning over Beryl's restless, fevered form that kept him awake.

He landed once more by the shores of Lake Naivasha, this time keeping plane and body intact. On this occasion he interrupted a round of croquet (played, he was grateful to see, with wooden balls). Upon seeing his human cargo, Joss had greeted him with, "Not another call to Doctor Vint, Saint-Ex! I swear, I waste more petrol on you than on ten mistresses!"

But Joss's tender handling of Beryl belied his mock indignation.

Saint-Ex slept around the clock and awoke with immense *déjà vu* in the same bed and room that had first sheltered him – could it be only two weeks ago? After looking in on a sleeping Beryl and learning that Doctor Vint had successfully removed the bullet and predicted a full recovery, Saint-Ex prevailed upon his host to drive him to Nairobi.

"You shall soon have all the damned petrol you wish, man! You can fill your swimming pool with it! Let us not quibble about a few gallons!"

In the city Saint-Ex tracked down Gwladys, Lady Delamere, Mayor of Nairobi, in the cool rooms of the Muthaiga Club. Dropping unbidden into a seat at her table, Saint-Ex launched into a recitation of his exploits, not stinting on the heroism of both himself and Beryl and even little Jimmy. Throughout, Lady Delamere said nothing, listening with imperial mien.

"My good Count," she finally ventured as Saint-Ex sat expectantly, "we appreciate all your efforts to establish a toehold for Kenya in the Middle East. Once, we

thought it was a feasible idea. But I am afraid that your news of armed opposition at Basra, combined with new developments here, render such a foray most unlikely."

"Unlikely! But, madame, the future of civilization rests on such a campaign!"

Lady Delamere fanned herself nonchalantly. "Oh, I think not, Count. Kenya has plenty of natural resources other than oil on which to build a very comfortable little life for we few surviving whites. The brute labour of the natives alone should suffice. And with careful rationing, our fuel-stocks will last for many years yet."

Saint-Ex thumped the table. "And what then! What of all the children, born and yet to come! The future Mozarts and Lindberghs?"

Lady Delamere sniffed haughtily. "As you might have observed, Count, we are not a proletarian clan that tends to reproduce overmuch."

Striving to repress his natural indignation, Saint-Ex asked, "What are these new developments locally, if I may inquire?"

Lady Delamere had sufficient tatters of conscience left to look slightly abashed. "It's the fishing at Lake Victoria. Suddenly, Lord Delamere's frightfully keen on it. And then there's a clinic there with fabulous mud treatments for we ladies." Gwladys giggled coquettishly, producing an effect akin to story-boards from the Disney studios of tutu-clad hippos which Saint-Ex had seen when he had visited Hollywood in 1933 for the filming of his *Night Flight*.

Saint-Ex was stupefied. "Lady Delamere, you are throwing away your heritage. Future generations shall curse your name!"

And then he stormed out.

All the way back to Djinn Palace, Saint-Ex had raved to Joss, who listened attentively while driving. When the Frenchman finally subsided, the Scottish lord had said, "Do you want to know your first mistake?"

Saint-Ex growled.

"It was framing your appeal to all our so-called better instincts. Same mistake old Herbert George Wells made with all those dreadful utopias of his. We haven't any! Not a shred! No more than the general run of mankind does, anyhow. You should have preached to our self-interest."

"I thought I was."

"No, not at all."

"Bah! You are all hyenas!"

"Maybe so. But we're *your* pack of hyenas now."

At the mansion, Saint-Ex raced to Beryl's bedside, finding her awake and taking some broth as her first nourishment.

"*Ma chère*, you look almost your old formidable self!"

Beryl did not smile or greet him, but continued sipping her broth.

"What troubles you?" Saint-Ex asked, dropping onto the bed beside her.

Beryl pinned him with her steely look as if he were insect specimen. "You left me alone, Tonio. I woke up and you weren't here. I don't care for that kind of treatment. Not one bit."

Saint-Ex slapped his forehead. "*Mon dieu*! I was pursuing our common goal, Beryl! Talking to that witch in the city—"

"Evidently your schemes are more important than

my well-being."

"Yes, of course! They are more important than my own life also!"

"Well, I'm no longer sure about how I feel. When I was in my fever, I dreamed of all those beasts we saw in our flight. To see 10,000 animals untamed and not branded with the symbols of human commerce is like scaling an unconquered mountain for the first time, or like finding a forest without roads or footpaths, or the blemish of an axe. You know then what you had always been told – that the world once lived and grew without adding machines and newsprint and brick-walled streets and the tyranny of the clock."

"Surely my ears betray me! This is purest defeatism! There can be no turning back on the road of progress. What are the 200 years of the history of the machine compared with the 200,000 years of the history of man? Only a step! We are in truth still emigrants who have not yet founded our homeland. Would you give up now?"

Beryl set down her cup and turned away from him. "Tonio, you trouble me. Go away now. Please."

And so he had gone from her room. And Beryl had returned several days later to Njoro without saying farewell.

Then had Saint-Ex plunged fully into the heedless life at Djinn Palace.



"Your shrimp, sir."

Saint-Ex unblinded himself, saw the waiting Somaian servant. The guest patted his stomach to indicate the tray's proper resting place. After the servant had deposited it, Saint-Ex dug in while still reclining, trying to sate himself like an ancient Roman. Meanwhile, around him the nightly debauched activities of the white colonists, unfazed by armageddon, soared and spiralled in their ever-changing intricate patterns, producing shrieks, giggles, crashes and yelps.

A snippet of talk winged into Saint-Ex's ear. "Why, she loves jewellery so much, do you know what she says when she crosses herself? 'Tiara, brooch, clip, clip!'"

When Saint-Ex was finished he got to his feet, sending the tray sliding to the floor with a clatter. Woozily, he began to wander the maze of the Djinn Palace, looking for distractions from the ache tamped down within him.

In one dark corner, he spotted two feminine shadows seated on a love-seat. Moving closer, he was able to discern the bouncy American Kiki Preston and her inseparable British friend Alice de Trafford. Neither appeared to be their usual giddy selves. They clutched each other and shivered. Kiki appeared to be sobbing.

"Beautiful ladies, what frightens you?" Saint-Ex inquired in a gallant manner spoiled only by a terminal belch. "Point out any monsters that need slaying, and I will sally forth."

Alice seemed the more composed of the two. "You can't slay this monkey, Count. He feeds only on magic powder, and the less he has, the stronger he grows."

Saint-Ex was puzzled. "I don't comprehend—"

Suddenly Kiki hurled herself at the Frenchman like a wildcat. "Soupy, Soupy, Soupy, you've got to fly me to Port Said! I've got a plane, haven't I? Port Said's where the junk comes from! I need my junk!" She began to

wail like a banshee. "Where's Frankie! Oh, where's Frankie! He always had all the horse I needed!"

Saint-Ex disentangled the girl's clammy limbs from his own, and she collapsed back across Alice's lap.

Petting the other woman's hair, Alice said, "Frankie Greswolde Williams. The colony's connection for heroin. He didn't make it back from his final run, and now almost all the smack in Kenya is gone. Except of course for Lady Delamere's stash." Alice's voice assumed a manic quality that frightened Saint-Ex. "How I hate that woman! A greedy, puffy pig! Look what she's done to poor Kiki. Oh, I hurt too, of course. But Kiki's got the jones worse than I. Kiki, Kiki, love, hang in there. I'll help you somehow, I swear...."

Shaken, appalled, confused, Saint-Ex staggered off, feeling as if he were ambling through Dante.

The first door he came to, he grabbed the knob, twisted it and entered.

There was a young teenage girl, entirely naked, doubled over the back of a chair, her rump high. Over her towered the lean clothed figure of John Carberry, a riding crop in his hand.

With a swish and thwack, Carberry brought the whip down on her scarred buttocks.

"I'll teach you a thing or two, young miss!"

In the next second, Saint-Ex had spun the master of Seremai around and planted a solid roundhouse punch on his jaw. Carberry went flying across the room. Saint-Ex rushed to the girl.

"Mam'selle, are you hurt?"

Without changing position, the girl turned a teary face to Saint-Ex and said, "He can't hurt me, really. Not your own bastard Daddy. I only take it so he doesn't do it to Mummy."

Saint-Ex sprang back in shock. What a nest of vipers!

From behind Saint-Ex came Carberry's voice. "I said you were dead when your plane arrived. Unfortunately, I was wrong. Now I shall correct the situation."

The death-faced man held a gun calmly pointed at Saint-Ex. Without further oratory, he began to squeeze the trigger.

Saint-Ex lunged.

A roaring filled his ears, bitter smoke his nostrils, darkness his sight.



For the third time after recent great travail, Saint-Ex awoke in the same sun-flooded bedroom at the lunatic asylum by the shores of Lake Naivasha. He felt bound on some wheel of continuous, duplicative suffering. Would he ever escape this place?

The voice of Joss Erroll interrupted his musings. "Bloody lot of shooting last night. Can't say I approve. Deucedly hard to clean up all that blood."

His unflappable host came across the room from where he had been sitting, and put a hand to the side of Saint-Ex's head.

"Ouch! What a pain!"

"Oh, you overgrown child, it's just a flesh wound. Even I could recognize that. Damn swell of you to save me the trouble of fetching Doctor Vint this time, though. It's just as well he got what sleep he could before they summoned him for the Delameres. Not that he could do much for them."



Saint-Ex shot bolt upright. "The Delameres! What happened?"

"They were found by two milk boys at first daylight. Sitting in their Buick at the intersection of the Karen and Ngong roads. Shot in the head, both of them, right behind the ear, as if the killer had been in the back seat. No signs of struggle, so they plainly knew the assassin." Joss shivered. "I've always felt superstitious about that spot. Gloomy place, just right for an ambush by one's enemies. That's why I try not to make any."

"But, but – this changes everything! Who has authority now here?"

"Rather precipitous, old chap, to talk politics before the bodies of the old king and queen are even cold, don't you think? No mourning for the dead? No, I suppose not, not after what this tattered old world has seen. Well, to answer your question: *l'état, c'est moi*. As long as I have the support of the others, that is, who can't be bothered to govern."

"And would you – that is, can I convince you—?"

Joss held up a hand. "Didn't I just say I try to please everyone, Tonio?" He dropped his hand to Saint-Ex's knee. "If only everyone could try to please me...."

Saint-Ex was aghast at this unnatural solicitation, but hid his feelings. After no response, Joss lifted up his hand and sighed melodramatically. "Well, I had to try. You rest now, Tonio, for your grand assault on the future."

At the bedroom door, Joss stopped. "Did I ever tell you what dear little Alice once did? Shot her husband right in the middle of a Paris train station. 'Fastest gun in the Gare du Nord' was what we called her for a while. Damned determined little chit. Especially when her friends are in trouble."



Wilson Airways had been the *de facto* Kenyan flagship line. Co-founded by the same Tom Black who had taught Beryl to fly, Wilson possessed the best facilities from which to mount the assault on Basra.

This bright morning, some two weeks after the murders of the Delameres, the runways were once again, as of old, full of planes, their burnished parts gleaming in the sunlight.

Here was the nucleus of Wings Over the World, summoned from across Kenya and nearby localities.

Mostly British and French models, hardly any two were alike. There were several different Gipsy Moths and a Puss Moth, as well as a few other De Havilland types, along with an old open-cockpit Breguet-14, the sight of which brought a nostalgic tear to Saint-Ex's eye. An Avro Avian IV stood between a Hanriot-14 and a Caudron-59. Several different Latecoere models flanked a Potez-25. There were even a Piper Cub, a Lockheed and a Messerschmitt to render the fleet truly international.

And of course, there was Beryl Markham's Vega Gull, *The Messenger II*.

The only thing that outshone the planes in Saint-Ex's eyes were their pilots.

In a loose cluster they stood now, at mission's start, leather-jacketed, insouciant, brash, goggles pushed up on their brows. They were his to command, proud vassals, just as he was their sworn leader, selfless in service to the greater whole. In near-symbiotic unison,

they would be invincible.

Tom Wilson was present, chatting with his good friends, the husband and wife team of Jim and Amy Mollison. Sydney St Barbe, former instructor for the London Aeroplane Club, seemed to be trying to seduce the beautiful "Silver Jane" Wynne-Eaton. June Carberry, wife to the man who had tried to kill Saint-Ex, was in conversation with Tom "Woody" Woods. To Saint-Ex's surprise, she had broken away from her husband's cruel rule enough to join in the enterprise. (Carberry himself had retreated to Seremai to sulk and lick his wounds, and Saint-Ex had breathed a sigh of relief.)

All the pilots had Saint-Ex's approbation. But there were two (well, three, although a certain female one still wasn't speaking to him) who had a claim on his heart. There they stood, living miracles: Henri Guillaumet and Jean Mermoz, his bosom companions from the Aeropostale days.

The two had appeared in Nairobi several days ago, and their reunion with Saint-Ex had been a tearful carnival. When Saint-Ex had been able to ask them how they had got here, Guillaumet cavalierly replied, "Why, we mostly walked, after our hunch as to your whereabouts! Is that not so, Jean? Just as I walked out of the Andes that time, Jean and I set out to visit our old friend on foot. The boat from Suez to Mombassa was incidental. And why? We were hungry for his card tricks, of course. That is all."

Saint-Ex had immediately appointed them his second and third in command.

Internationalism was all well and good, but there was – would ever be – only one *belle France*!

Now Saint-Ex climbed atop an upended crate and lifted his arms for silence. The massed aviators of Happy Valley turned to face him. In the rear of the crowd, Beryl removed a cigarette and blew smoke rings in his general direction, a sly smile on her ripe lips.

"*Mes amis*," began Saint-Ex, then switched to English. "Today, we make some history, no? Here are some words to think on, from *M'sieur Wells*."

Lifting his battered copy of *Things to Come*, Saint-Ex paused. The heft of the book reminded him of his own unfinished manuscript, languishing in its hatbox. Would he ever turn his hand to that fanciful children's fable again? It seemed unlikely, with all the new duties looming ahead. Ah, well, writing had always been only his second love....

Looking out over the crowd of expectant faces, Saint-Ex now recited.

"The first man in this drama says, 'My God! Is there never to be an age of happiness? Is there never to be rest?' His comrade answers, 'Rest enough for the individual man. Too much of it and too soon, and we call it death. But for Man, no rest and no ending. He must go on – conquest beyond conquest. This little planet and its winds and ways, and all the laws of mind and matter that restrain him. Then the planets about him, and at last out across the immensity to the stars. And when he has conquered all the deeps of space and all the mysteries of time – still he will be beginning.'"

Saint-Ex closed the book with a sharp slap. Someone sniffled in the crowd. Then came the bumptious voice of Julian "Lizzie" Lezard.

"I say! Do any of you blokes know which end of this

bloody dynamite one lights?"

Each plane was to carry a non-flier supercargo whose job would be to bomb the recalcitrant Arabs into submission with leftover construction explosives. As much as Saint-Ex wished for Wells's non-violent pacification gas, this was his only option. Even more hapless men must die, before the world could be reborn.

When the laughter died down, Saint-Ex called out, "*Allons! We fly!*"

Jumping down, Saint-Ex headed towards Kiki Preston's plane. The scatterbrained heiress was already onboard, her *joi de vivre* fully restored with access to Lady Delamere's drugs and the prospect of a renewed pipeline.

"Yoo hoo, Soupy! Don't forget the brandy!"

Saint-Ex patted his hip pocket significantly.

"If I find so much as a single hair on your collar when this is over, I'll scratch the eyes out of that little baggage. What I'll do to you will be unspeakable."

Beryl strode beside him, leonine hair catching glints of solar radiance. Saint-Ex pretended not to have heard her.

From her Vega Gull, Jimmy Ballard poked his head out and called, "Aunt Beryl, hurry! We mustn't keep our new friends waiting!"

Now Saint-Ex feigned to see Beryl for the first time. "Oh, *Mam'selle* Markham. I am so grateful you could spare us time from your beloved horses. Is it that you wish some final advice on your flying? Do not continue

to handle the stick like child with its lollipop—”

"Child with a lollipop! Why, I'll show you!"

Grabbing him by the chinstrap of his leather helmet, Beryl tugged Saint-Ex's head down the inch or two necessary to reach her level. Her breath washed across his face with odours of tobacco and coffee. Saint-Ex felt hypnotized, as if facing a carnivore of the veldt. Without warning, she locked her burning lips to his for a full minute, during which their arms reflexively enwrapped each other.

When they unclinked, the whole company broke into applause.

"Beryl, my princess."

She poked his ponderous stomach. "Princess! And you're – what then? Oh, I have it! My little prince!"



Paul Di Filippo is one of the great individualists of the sf/fantasy field. His (long-delayed) first novel, *Ciphers*, is just out from Cambrian Publications/Permeable Press, and it follows three brilliantly clever collections, *The Steampunk Trilogy*, *Ribofunk* and *Fractal Paisleys* (the third of which is reviewed in this issue of *Interzone* by Pete Crowther) – all published by the high-quality New York hardcover press Four Walls Eight Windows (and distributed in Britain by Turnaround).

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My suspicion of Gene Wolfe's buried dig at US critic Gregory Feeley (see *IZ* 123) led to a letter from Feeley himself: "Here's a Fun Quiz for your readers. What do the following novels – *The Paper Gail* by James P. Blaylock, *Fallen Angels* by Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle and Michael Flynn, *The Scalehunter's Beautiful Daughter* by Lucius Shepard, and *Exodus from the Long Sun* by Gene Wolfe – have in common?" Oh dear.

THE INNER CIRCLES

Brian Aldiss announced his holiday plans in *The New Yorker*: "I'd sign up for a trip to Mars. I'd like to see it as a sort of Ayer's Rock in the sky, where you can commune with the cosmos. It would also be good for a honeymoon."

William S. Burroughs (1914-1997), last of the Beat Generation writers, author of several influentially deranged novels since *The Naked Lunch* (1959), and giver of mythic significance to the word Interzone, died on 2 August.

George Alec Effinger, despite depression, a diagnosis of hepatitis C, and bankruptcy following vast medical bills, was cheered by good luck in court. "At the bankruptcy hearing, when the judge decided who would maintain my rights to the continuing characters (Maureen Birnbaum, Marid, etc.) as well as the rights to everything else I've published, the bank's trustees didn't show up. I won by default and was out of there in ten minutes."

John Elliot (1918-1997), who collaborated with Fred Hoyle on the BBC's *A for Andromeda* and *The Andromeda Breakthrough*, and both serials' novelizations, died in Bristol on 14 August.

David Garnett sent a circumspect press release: "The latest (last?) *New Worlds* has been published in the USA by White Wolf, and David Garnett has said he's quitting as editor. Is there any connection? 'No comment,' said Garnett. What about the spineless, brainless, gutless behaviour of British publishers in refusing a British edition? 'No fucking comment.'"

John Grant has been hired to run the Paper Tiger sf/fantasy art-books list for its new owners Collins & Brown.

Carl Jacobi (1908-1997), US author of pulp horror, fantasy and sf since 1929, died in Minneapolis on 25 August.

Terry Pratchett was, inevitably, at Clarecraft's open-air Discworld Event: "More than 50 people in the masquerade, about ten of whom would have done well on a Worldcon stage. There were five Rincewinds of

ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

various sizes, all with pretty good costumes, so in the end we lined 'em up about 30 yards away and the first one to cross the line got a prize. If I close my eyes I can still see them, robes flapping, as they stampeded straight at me...."

Norman Spinrad issued a public-domain message to the sf world, complaining of being effectively blacklisted by US distributors following poor sales – ascribed to poor promotion – of *Pictures at 11*, and offering his new novel *He Walked Among Us* for a one-dollar advance to any publisher prepared to give it a good home. The sample chapter on show at the Spinrad web site peevishly describes an sf author's rotten time as guest at a convention full of overweight fans. Students of fan slang were alarmed to find "smoffing" (talking fan politics; from SMOF, Secret Master of Fandom) defined as "public gropings and smoochings."

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

Hugo Awards presented at Lone-StarCon 2, 55th World SF Convention, San Antonio, Texas ... Novel: Kim Stanley Robinson, *Blue Mars*. Novella: George R. R. Martin, "Blood of The Dragon" (*Asimov's* 7/96). Novelle: Bruce Sterling, "Bicycle Repairman" (*Asimov's* 10/96). Short: Connie Willis, "The Soul Selects Her Own Society..." (*Asimov's* 4/96). Non-Fiction: L. Sprague de Camp, *Time & Chance* (autobiography). Dramatic: *Babylon 5*, "Severed Dreams." Editor: Gardner Dozois. Professional Artist: Bob Eggleton. Semiprozine: *Locus*. Fanzine: *Mimosa*. Fan Writer: Dave Langford. Fan Artist: William Rotzler. John W. Campbell Award (not a Hugo): Michael A. Burstein.

Wrong Address. Kurt Vonnegut was reported all over Internet as having delivered a characteristically dotty MIT commencement address, beginning: "Wear sunscreen. / If I could

offer you only one tip for the future, sunscreen would be it." Chasing this folksy wisdom came the information that the text was in fact from a *Chicago Tribune* column by one Mary Schmuch, who hadn't even intended a Vonnegut pastiche. No one knows who attached KV's name and hoaxed countless net users. As with the "Kilgore Trout" *Venus on the Half Shell*, Vonnegut can look forward to being asked about his MIT Address for the rest of his life.

World Fantasy Awards will be presented in mere days. Shortlisted novels: Terence M. Green, *Shadow of Ashland*; William Kotzwinkle, *The Bear Went Over The Mountain*; Marc Laidlaw, *The 37th Mandala*; George R. R. Martin, *A Game of Thrones*; Rachel Pollack, *Godmother Night*; Melanie Rawn, Jennifer Roberson & Kate Elliott, *The Golden Key*; Mark Sumner, *Devil's Tower*.

In Typo Veritas. Spies report that Borgo Press's scanning software (which has trouble with the letter-pair "cl") suggested a creative text improvement for the coming reprint of William F. Temple's *The Fleshpots of Sansato* ... "He shut the door quietly with a soft dick."

Radioactive. Mark Lawson's *A Brief History of the Future* (Radio 4) had a nice turn of phrase: "Fiction that looks ahead has generally been most popular at times when the future seemed uncertain. H. G. Wells had capitalized on turn-of-the-century nervousness. From the 1950s, the form was invigorated by an invention which might prevent the next century from turning: *David Pringle*." ... Who, in a slight anticlimax, then came on the air to discuss atom bombs.

Thog's Masterclass. *Dept of In Space No One Can Hear You Scream*: "He'd soon learnt to speak in a half shout, sound didn't carry far in free fall." (Peter F. Hamilton, *Mindstar Rising*, 1993) ... "The argument was a peripatetic orang-utan, bouncing off the walls of their separate frustrations like a ping-pong ball in a wind tunnel." (David Gerrold, "Chess with a Dragon," 1987) ... "The underwriter seemed equally amused, frisking up the ends of his moustache, eager for them to join in the fun." (J. G. Ballard, *Cocaine Nights*, 1996) ... "Theory is able to predict long-term dangers in practice, the mouth beneath those cornflower eyes commented." (Robert Conquest, *A World of Difference*, 1955) ... "He covered his face and pressed his fingertips against his closed eyes in a vain effort to wipe the blood-stained images from his retinas. His fingers could not reach deep enough." (Patrick Tilley, *The Amtrak Wars*, 1983) ... "And with his eyes he literally scoured the corners of the cell." (Vladimir Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading*, 1959)

Unashamedly English



Paul Cornell

interviewed by

Paul Brazier

The *Uninvited* is a four-part science fiction thriller appearing on ITV in the UK this autumn. While previews were not available at the time of writing, I did get to read the tie-in novelization (published by Virgin on October 16, £5.99). It is redolent of much 1950s sf, from *Quatermass*, via *Day of the Triffids* to *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. But it is brought bang up to date with a New Labour, post-Major, quintessentially English setting, and some pithy nineties-man character insights

The original idea for *The Uninvited* was Leslie Grantham's, and he also stars and is the Executive Producer. But the novelization was written by Paul Cornell.

Paul Cornell first came to my attention as the author of *Timewyrms: Revelation*, one of the first novels in Virgin Publications' *Dr Who: The New Adventures* project (hereinafter referred to as *The Virgin Doctor* to distinguish it from *The BBC Dr Who*). As the Virgin series progressed, he produced no less than seven of the Virgin Doctor novels, including the aforesaid *Revelation*, *Love and War*, *No Future*, *Human Nature*, *Happy Endings*, and *Oh, No It Isn't*. But he is also a prolific author and scriptwriter outside the Dr Who sharecrop.

"I have over 20 books published," he says, "including *The Guinness Book of Classic British TV* (with Keith Topping and Martin Day), a teenage horror novel under the name of Maria Palmer, a little book of lit.

crit. and essay assignments about Isaac Asimov, published only in Spanish, a story in *The Weerde*, and, of course, seven *Dr Who New Adventures* and *Missing Adventures*. My TV credits include episodes of *The Ward*, *Coronation Street* (from which I was sacked because I was rubbish at it), *Springhill* (of which I storylined the second season with Gareth Roberts), and my own series, *Wavelength*. I have done a bit of comedy on radio, (see below), and in comics, some *Dr Who* comic strips, plus I created *Pan-African Judges* and *Deathwatch* for the *Judge Dredd Magazine*.

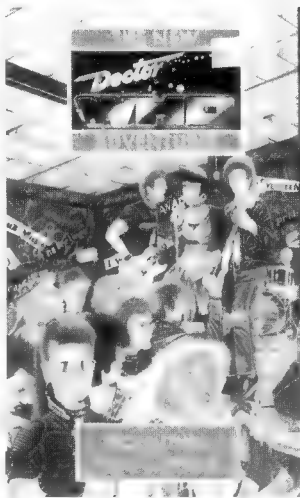
Paul was born in Wiltshire in 1967 and his parents' house is in a valley beneath downlands with a white horse and an iron age hillfort [not unlike *Interzone* HQ]. He remembers:

"I wanted to be an astronomer when I grew up, owing to a love for the stars and a pre-pubescent crush on TV astronomy buff Heather Couper. That took me as far as UCL, where I did two weeks or so of a BSc Astrophysics, and was desperately unhappy. I chucked it in, went to live in Barrow-in-Furness, and started to try to write for a living. I did a BA in Writing, English and Philosophy at Crewe & Alsager, then an MA in writing at Lancaster. I moved a lot. All the way through this process, the culture that I came from, *Dr Who* fandom, sustained me and gave me a gang of peers to measure myself against. It's odd to emphasize it, I know, but the more I think about it, the more I realize that I've been completely formed by *Dr Who* fandom. I think it's time a writer put his hand up and admitted it."

I mentioned that my own love of sf was formed primarily in the 1950s by the sf available on radio, and asked if Paul admitted to any such influences.

"Apart from the love of *Dr Who* that came with Peter Davison's Doctor and was revived by Sylvester McCoy, and thus the writing of people like Terrance Dicks and Christopher Bailey, I'd have to mention Nigel Kneale, Tim Powers, Arthur C. Clarke, Clive Barker, Harlan Ellison, Michael Moorcock, Alan Moore, Frank Hampson, Grant Morrison, P.J. Hammond... I love sf radio, so, like you, I'd

include Charles Chilton. Rather than the current trend for NASA fiction, I'd love to write the lost future of the British Rocket Group. Oh, and I've just got addicted to *Babylon 5*."



Apart from a terrible novel written for his first agent, unpublished and burnt, Paul's debut novel was *Timewyrm: Revelation*, his first for the Virgin *Dr Who* line, published in 1990. Prior to this he wrote a lot of fan fiction that was published in fanzines, "which is what you do when you come from fandom."

Despite doing a few things for *Doctor Who* magazine, and having his fan fiction everywhere in the fanzines, the request to write a *Dr Who* novel for Virgin came, he says, "completely out of the blue. For a struggling writer with my background, the *New Adventures* seemed like the obvious thing to go for. I sent in two chapters and a plot and they accepted it! Everything was happening at once, because at the same time I was writing my BBC2 play ('Kingdom Come') and working as a script editor on a Radio 4 comedy series ('Arnold Brown & Company') out of Manchester. Three things came along at once!"

What is most fascinating about Paul's *Dr Who* novels is their surreal air, a quality always present but

sadly much underplayed in the TV programmes. It is difficult to tell from the books alone whether this surrealism was a conscious ploy on Paul's part, or an accident.

"I think it's true that I never really had the idea of writing *Dr Who* books that felt or read like things previously seen on TV. My fan fiction was really my own way of writing things, with these characters in. The surrealism comes from a feeling that the archetypal roots of *Dr Who*, plus the emotional and spiritual qualities that fandom has to search hard to find in it, should be represented on the surface too. Just because

BBC lighting and sets make things brutal and solid doesn't mean that, since we're using prose now, we can't make things dreamlike, misty and non-specific. Hence, in a novel like *Revelation* [which features a scene on the cover where the Doctor dances with a skeleton on the Moon], the

Doctor actually, rather than metaphorically, has Death as his companion."

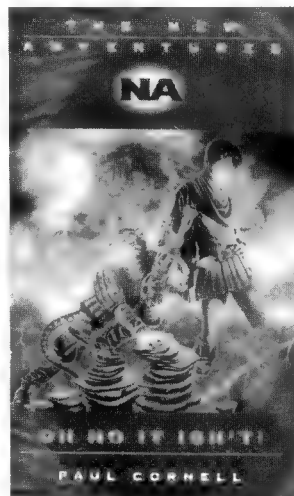
Virgin has published one *Dr Who* novel a month since they began. Obviously, by the time they were approaching 50 novels, they had a success on their hands, and the 50th novel would be something of a milestone. On the back cover of that novel, *Happy Endings*, written by Paul Cornell, it says that he is 'one of the most popular and prolific authors in the *New Adventures* series.' It is hard to imagine how this recognition came about; surely, it couldn't be book sales alone.

"I actually don't know about book sales. I'm a bit too English to ask. I'm not sure Virgin thinks like that, either. I suspect I got the 50th book because I had the idea for it. I sketched the front cover of one of those 'wedding' issues of a comic book (like the *Fantastic Four* wedding where all the villains showed up) on a writer response form at one of Virgin's authors' shindigs."

In order to make such a strong series of novels hang together so successfully, it seems evident that there must have been either a very strong editor or an extraordinary amount of authorial collusion.

"Rebecca Levene is an extraordinary editor, but we were all given the feeling that our editorial input, if you like, was welcomed. For instance, Virgin asked for

'auditions' for a new companion to replace Ace, asking us to submit ideas (which is where Bernice came from) [Professor Bernice Surprise Summerfield, usually known as Benny, is now the central character of the so-called 'Who-less' *New Adventures*, the continuation of the Virgin *New Adventures* series without Doctor Who]; various authors came up with ideas for linking threads for the series. There were many conferences involving not-yet commissioned authors, old hands and anybody else who had any ideas, plus the socials. It was like the Astronaut Office. With a few exceptions, we felt like a family. Until recently, we wouldn't even review each others' books! That's the way to run a line! Also, of course, we really started getting off on each others' continuity; people like Kate Orman calling around and using whatever anybody wanted to give. *Happy Endings* [with a closing chapter written by many of the series' favourite authors (try to spot your favourite!)] was the ulti-



mate expression of that communal vibe. One day, I hope to have such a wonderful creative experience again."

Towards the end of the Virgin Doctor series, the Doctor becomes more and more marginalized, so that sometimes he seems to be hardly more than a shadow drifting through the background of the novels – and then suddenly he is sharply foregrounded, only to die horribly, then come back from the grave, very like a vampire. This feels as if it is a conscious attempt on the part of the editors/authors to shift the focus of the novels from the Doctor to the milieu.

"I think two things were going on here. Some authors (the hard sf mob) seemed to feel that the Doctor was an unfortunate accessory that they had to put up with if they were going to get their sf novel published. But also, some of the authors were interested in the Doctor as a concept, and trying to examine him from different angles, or from a distance, making him more complicated than when he's the central figure we follow through the plot. That was the idea behind *Human Nature*, to see what the Doctor was really like by looking at the shape of the hole when he isn't there."

Samuel R. Delany has said that the most important character in an sf novel is the background. Certainly, the background that has been created for Benny, and to a lesser extent Chris Cwej, has successfully shifted the focus from the Doctor to Benny's continuum. It is difficult to tell from the fiction how much of this was intentional, and how much happenstance.

"A lot of intention. Virgin planned the Benny move almost as soon as they lost the license. And Virgin always had a problem with exploring the thoughts and personality of the Doctor. In a novel, you do that once, and then you can't really do it again, because we've been there, we know who he is now. So that distance proved useful when we had to continue without him."

It seemed that as the Virgin Doctor series grew, so new writers of sf in the UK were graduating to it rather than generic sf.

"Absolutely. We're here now. It's great to see so many of my peers doing great things, from *Coronation Street* to literary novels, to *Babylon 5* books, to fantasy novels."

Indeed. Good writers will succeed through, and probably transcend, whatever outlets are available to them in their milieu. And yet, literary sf has a hopelessly lofty attitude to so-called media sf. Perhaps media sf is the coming thing, and the sf dinosaurs, the "literary snobs" are an historic irrelevance.

"I try not to feel the inverse snobbery that comes from being excluded. Certainly, I think Kate Orman is as good or better a fantasy writer than

any of the new breed of 'serious' fantasy writers, and that rather than 'graduate' to a mainstream book, she has every right to do good work where she is. Now that writers like K.W. Jeter and C.J. Cherryh feel able to move between the two forms (equally, Stephen Baxter appeared in a recent Virgin Decalog collection), it blurs the line even further. My attitude is: rather than write mainstream post-modern fiction concerning the way the media is part of our lives, why not write postmodern fiction using those media? The faithfulness, fan irony and self-mocking deconstruction of a Gareth Roberts 4th Doctor novel are positively Warholesque. Erm, we're quite good, basically."

Certainly, recent *New Adventures* seem to have this attitude. Lawrence Miles' recent *Down*, and Matthew Jones' *Beyond The Sun* particularly seem to be intent on attacking the work of Iain Banks and Ursula Le Guin.

"I don't think that a gentle poke is really an attack. But both books acknowledge, in the fan way that is swiftly becoming the only way, that these texts exist and there are some fictional situations where we can't help thinking about them."

Paul is proud of creating the completely new character, Professor Bernice Surprise Summerfield. She is extraordinary, composed of equal parts courage, tenacity, insecurity, and alcoholism. It is possible that she is Paul Cornell, slightly disguised, as so many truly great fictional creations are slightly idealized projections of their creators...

"Exactly. I hope that's why people have been kind enough to say that she seems like a real woman, in that she's who I want to be, and not who I

want to shag. If you put me and Emma Thompson into the matter transporter from *The Fly*..."

...and that he is thus the late 20th century everyman...

"Erm..."

...and that in this character he encapsulates the universal oxy-moronic feeling that we both can change things if we only try, and are completely helpless in the face of events.

"That's the 'Carry-On' feeling, right? That the universe is big and hard and macho and probably in some way American, but that a gang of amateurs led by Kenneth Williams can win through despite that? I always felt the Doctor was an amateur. No gun, no mission, just a bit of faith that everybody can be friends and that tea and scones and self-mockery are important. Bernice is like that, too."

Just like the "Carry-On" films and *The Uninvited*, The Virgin Dr Who novels are, in fact, unashamedly English, and they are at their strongest when they play directly to their target audience, as with the bizarre coming-to-life of pantomime tropes in *Oh, No It Isn't*.

"Unashamedly."

Now that the BBC has clawed back the rights to the Dr Who character and is indeed publishing its own series of novels, Paul has chosen not to move but stay with Virgin. But the BBC has a fundamentally different approach to producing Dr Who novels.

"I did submit a BBC novel. It was a Hartnell historical set amongst the islands of Ancient Greece. It was called *Doctor Who and the Lesbians*. I don't know why they turned it down. I think the BBC are doing fine, and most of us have gone over to do stuff with them. Maybe their approach is a bit reductive, a bit too

The Uninvited – below: Leslie Grantham is the sinister Chief Superintendent Gates.

Overleaf: Douglas Hodge as Steve Blake, and Lia Williams as Melissa Gates.



Photograph: Stephen F. Morley



Photograph: Stephen F. Morley

straightforward, whereas the great thing about the Virgin Doctor was the continuing evolution, but every producer of *Dr Who* has changed it to suit the times. I wish them well. Maybe we'll do something when I've had a rest from the telly stuff."

Having contracted to write the novelization of *The Uninvited*, it must have felt in some ways to be the ultimate reversal, to go from creating new stories around established characters to doing a straight novelization of a TV sf serial. It couldn't have been easy, turning a script into such a finely-made novel.

"Peter Bowker [the script-writer] is a good writer from outside the sf field. He stumbled upon sf tropes and worked his way through them, discovering interesting things that sf writers, so caught up in the to-and-fro of genre, might have missed. For example, the alien duplicates have the memories of the people they're impersonating, so they know how they're supposed to be acting. The question of your friend being not who he says he is then becomes a truly philosophical one: if he's got all the memory, and acts in a completely human way, then how can you know who he is?"

This aspect is explored particularly poignantly in the form of an old lady with Alzheimer's who ends up, when the aliens arrive, sharing both her mind and the increasing confusion her disease causes with an alien in a brand new duplicate body.

"Also, we never learn much about the aliens, so they don't have conversations where they talk about the foolish humans and say 'excellent' a lot. (That's what we need, more positive expressions for aliens. I'd like to see two aliens saying: 'Our plans are proceeding!' 'Oh, that's fab!') And this gave me loads of room to expand on them and their point of view.

"The archetypal depth intrigued

me too, with the town that fell into the sea. These aliens come upon us like changelings, out of the ocean, and it is entirely fitting that we never see their mode of travel, or any of their technology. 'We're just like you,' Gates says at the end.

"It's popular TV, but it's lyrical and deep enough to please a fantasy audience a great deal. And for once we have a simple, direct ending that the script has established to make complete sense. One person can defeat this invasion, for one very good reason."

The comparison with 1950s English sf is unavoidable.

"*The Uninvited* is very Nigel Kneale, and that's what attracted me to it. All these ordinary people wander on and comment on the alien events.

"We resurrected a number of scripted scenes cut because of running length, including an absolutely Kneale-ian scene between our hero and a petrol pump attendant, who's witnessing the fires at Sellafeld with glee, and looking forward to the living he can make out of the end of the world. John Wyndham was a stated influence on the scripts, and I've emphasized the Ballardian, cosy British disaster aspect, with the heroes finding comfort in the empty land and the beauty of the disaster itself."

Apart from the very identifiable modern-day England, the novel seems realistic because the characters are so believable.

"Leslie Grantham's character is very good, because he doesn't go over the top and 'play an alien', but uses the

memories his character is supposed to have – so he comes over as a very understandable, everyday villain."

Given that Paul is so good at women characters, it was surprising to find the story so strongly male

"But there are Joanna and Melissa, and I get to do scenes from both their points of view. I enjoyed writing Blake's ex-wife Joanna a lot, because her mocking humour nicely underscores the seriousness of what's happening, and reminds me of Bernice. But this is the first thing I've done with mostly a male viewpoint character, and it was weird. I turned into this sort of FHM man for the duration, and became interested in scuba diving and Zoe Ball. I found myself driving with a cruel smile on my features, and thinking that down those mean streets I must go – but I must not myself become mean.

"This story happens in something very like the real world, and is essentially about people hurt through separation and divorce trying to identify who they, and those around them, really are. Bowker is very image-orientated, as a good TV writer should be, and I've used the luxury of prose to go places that, because of the medium, he couldn't. With such a lot of co-operation from Zenith, I think we've found a very ethical, very interesting way of doing a novelization, instead of just dashing it off as usually happens. I'm very proud of it as a book in itself.

"And, despite starting out with just a grubby script and a videotape, I did get to meet Leslie Grantham at the launch afterwards. Nice teeth."

Given the above, Paul also shows a very human propensity for valuing his own roots. "The book I'm most proud of is published the same day as *The Uninvited*: it's a compilation of fanzine material I've edited, entitled *Licence Denied*. I think it describes my culture rather well."

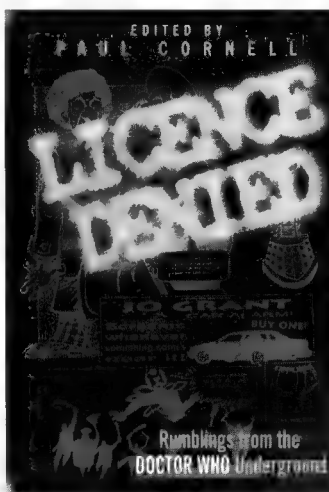
Paul has many plans for the future. He wants to produce some new, truly stand-alone fiction...

"I'm talking to a very great editor who I shouldn't name, and I really hope to do a fantasy novel with her."

...But apart from this, he says, "I want to help my children's TV series, *Wavelength*, continue to prosper. There's also the possibility of a tele-

fantasy series, which I can't really talk about. And a sitcom that I want to do. And I really want to write for *Babylon 5*. As if."

In an infinite universe, anything is possible – and if Paul Cornell ever does get to write an episode of *Babylon 5*, at last even I might have found a good reason to watch an episode. ■



Doctor Boodge

A Contemporary Fantasy

Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff

WHEN REEDY WATSON WAS STILL A YOUNG MAN, HE determined he must find a way to avoid Death. He came to this determination as a result of the death of his father, a very direct and uncomplicated man who, as the cliché goes, died young and left a good-looking corpse. He also left a sorrowing wife and perplexed child. His father's death impressed Reedy. Within a few years, Death dominated his thoughts.

Reedy watched Death carefully. He observed the myriad ways people met it. They drove into it at high speeds, they walked in front of it, they leapt to it, they ate or drank or smoked their way to it. They variously took their loved ones with them or left them behind to grieve as his father had done. It seemed to Reedy that no one tried particularly hard to avoid it. Mostly, they were non-*compos mentis*, their minds on something else, not looking where they were going, not mindful of what or how much they were consuming. They were, Reedy thought, just asking for Death to pounce upon them in inattentive moments. He decided he would not have inattentive moments.

He did not. He lived every waking moment in the present, self-aware and self-possessed. This impressed everyone around him – his mother, who thought him an overly serious child; his teachers, who thought him incredibly bright; his fellow students, who thought him patently strange. He was aware of their regard, but it didn't affect him.

He was a remarkable student, with tremendous powers of observation. He favoured the academic disciplines – the sciences rather than the arts – for music and prose and poetry tempted him to forget where he was and dwell somewhere other than the here and now. He excelled in “hard sciences,” won honours and, by the time he graduated high school, was being courted by prestigious schools.

At this point, it occurred to Reedy that, though he was attentive, he was also distinctive. If mere mortals marked his achievements, what might Death make of

them? He turned down scholarships from Harvard, Stanford and MIT to attend a tiny college in Maine.

Away from home, he determined he must do more to keep Death from locating him. Death, he theorized, might be muddled by misdirection. He changed his name from Reed to Richard and from Watson to Willis. He still signed letters to his mother “Reedy,” but it worried him to have such a traceable point of access. He mailed those letters from a neighbouring town. He also taught himself to write with his left hand as he thought that might confuse Death. His papers and local correspondence were written in the stand-up characters of the sinister hand; only his surreptitious letters home were written right-handed.

Reed/Richard was happy in Maine. His ageless little college town tempted him to forget that Death existed. The ivy on the walls of the town hall was older than the Constitution, and as he prepared to accept his Bachelor's degree, Reedy came to believe he might last indefinitely here. Then two impressive things happened upon the same day.

The first of these was a moment of inattentiveness such as he had never before allowed himself. He was crossing the tree-shaded cobbles before the college's main auditorium, *en route* to his graduation ceremony. Late, his arms encumbered with a half-open briefcase and his graduation robe, he was focused entirely on juggling. Out of the corner of his eye, as he approached mid-street, he noticed a female student hurrying in the opposite direction, her hair a banner in the cool spring breeze.

He hesitated, clutching the briefcase, and allowed himself a single moment to admire her beauty. In that moment, he was nearly run down by a car.

The driver swerved and honked and pulled over while Reedy rode a tide of adrenaline to the kerb. The driver apologized profusely. “I'm so sorry!” he said. “You were in such a hurry, I thought you'd be across by the time I got to this spot. When you stopped...”

Reedy soothed the driver, knowing the event was his own fault. From the safety of the auditorium steps, he looked about for the young woman who'd unwittingly distracted him. She was nowhere in sun-dappled view. He went inside. It was in this seemingly protected place that the second thing occurred: Reedy saw Death.

He was on-stage when he saw it. He had just finished his valedictorian speech and gathered up his notes when he looked up toward the back of the auditorium and saw Death sitting by the front doors against the wall. It looked much as he had imagined – dark clothing not unlike the habit worn by an Orthodox priest, a long saturnine face of which he could see only the half lit by the sunlight flooding through the front doors. Reedy thought the thin mouth smiled. He froze for a moment – another moment of gross inattention – and wondered about the mechanics of Death. Had the near accident brought Death here? Had that been Death's way of announcing himself? Or had Reedy dodged Death's earnest attempt to take him?

"Mister Willis!" An urgent whisper from the assistant dean brought him back to where he was. The audience watched him, expectant, hushed. He slipped from the podium drenched in sweat and applause and carefully retook his seat. He could still see Death sitting by the doors. His heart tripped over itself and began to race. He calmed it by reasoning that Death was no threat to him as long as he could see it and keep it at a distance.

He only took his eyes from it once during the remainder of the ceremony – when he returned to the podium for his diploma. When he glanced again to the back of the hall, Death had gone.

Words are inadequate to describe the extreme care with which Reedy left the auditorium and crossed the campus to his fraternity house. He didn't hurry – hurrying was what had driven him to inattention in the first place – he was careful, methodical. He packed, he arranged to get his transcripts, he left Maine, praying that Death might be diverted by digression.

He took a serpentine course across the country, heading westward. In Pennsylvania, he bleached his hair. When he reached the Ozarks, he had grown a beard, which he also bleached. In Nebraska, he changed his name to John Smits, reasoning that while "John Smith" was distinctive by virtue of its very blandness, he would be stupid to continue to use names with the initials RW. Perhaps that had been his mistake earlier.

As John Smits, Reedy enrolled at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, shifting his major subtly to one side – Cultural Anthropology rather than History.

He spent two years in Nebraska, his grey eyes made blue by contact lenses, his hair kept carefully blond.

Here, too, he was content. But here, too, he distinguished himself as a student, and at the end of his second year, he saw Death again.

A brilliant essay on the culture of Tanu Tuva had won him honours, attention and an awards banquet. He stood at the buffet, basking in congratulatory chatter and flirting with a striking young lady who had caught his eye, when he glanced up and across the food-laden table. At first, he wasn't sure it was Death looking back at him, for the clothing was different and the face was almost featureless, but when Reedy looked

into the eyes, he had no doubt. They were frigid, colourless eyes and they filled him with such terror, he forgot about the girl. He forgot about anything but how close he was to Death. He put down his plate, fled the banquet and received his award by mail the day he left Nebraska.

He understood now that digression was not enough. He must also avoid distinguishing himself.

When he arrived in Berkeley, California, his eyes were brown, his hair and mustache were black, his skin was deeply tanned from days beneath ultraviolet lamps (tanning in real sunlight, he reasoned, was an open invitation to Death). His name was Vishnu Bhaktidas and he had cultivated a very slight, but very precise East Indian accent.

Though she lived less than one hundred miles away, he did not visit Reedy Watson's mother. He did not go to her wedding when she remarried in the winter of his second year at Berkeley. He earned a master's degree in Archaeology and did not wait for Death to put in an appearance before relocating again, this time in New Mexico.

Paulo Martinez took his Master's degree into the field, working as a corporate archaeologist. During his sojourn there, he saw Death only in art – in paintings, on the walls of tombs, as tiny figurines in native shrines. He was not a superstitious man, so unearthing and handling these things didn't bother him in the least. He had seen Death; these were harmless effigies.

Three years later, when he returned to school in Arizona as Steve Nederman, he applied his time in the corporate environment toward a doctorate in History. He pursued post-doctoral studies at UCLA, reasoning that the sheer mass of the student body would grant him anonymity. He was content during that time, if not happy. He had few friends, for he must keep people at arm's length, but he had History, which had become a passion with him. He called himself Dr Douglas Dodge and there was more than a hint of pride in that name; he hadn't seen Death for nearly a decade.

He taught several classes in his second year at UCLA – classes that were always full. It didn't occur to him that his popularity was putting him in jeopardy until he looked up from a lecture one morning to see Death sitting in the front row. It wore a black leather jacket, which struck Reedy as somewhat clichéd, but the expression in its colourless eyes vacuum-froze Reedy's heart. His surprise was only momentary, then he continued his lecture, keeping his eyes on Death. At the end of the hour, Death rose and left, giving him a wintry backwards glance. Reedy's heart skidded, then picked up speed again, thudding so loudly, he barely heard the students clustered around him imploring his attention.

"Excuse me, professor?" A soft-voiced young woman tugged at his thoughts. "Are you all right?"

Already planning his next digression, he begged off, pleading a headache. He tried not to meet the girl's eyes, but they caught him, reminding him achingly of things that could not be thrown into a suitcase and moved, dyed a new colour, or changed through the DMV. He experienced, for the first time, a soul-deep twinge of longing for something he had just realized he

could never have.

He doubled back to Maine, enrolling as a student in the Master's program of the very school from which he had earned his Bachelor's degree. Let Death try to follow this, he thought, and thanked Providence for a youthful and easily disguised face.

This time he made real efforts not to be distinctive. His appearance was average, his grades were average, his name was average, his life was average... except in one respect; he kept himself aloof from members of the opposite sex, knowing full well that involvement could bring untold difficulties. This gave rise to the idea that he was gay, which in turn gave rise to several embarrassing situations that ended in hurt feelings on both sides. His small circle of friends dwindled even further. He was earning a reputation as an odd duck, and could only pray this did not draw Death's attention to him again.

In the third year of his new Master's program, Reedy's mother fell ill. He packed up his life and returned to California as Dr Reed Watson, finding his mother in a Sacramento hospital. She had AIDS, she told him, having evidently contracted it from a second husband disinclined to fidelity. Though he had protested he would stand by her, she had started divorce proceedings the day she was diagnosed.

Reedy was not comforted by that justice. In his own quest to elude Death, he had abandoned her. He could have been there when she remarried – should have been there. He could have taken one look at her husband-to-be and seen Death perched on his shoulder, he was certain of it.

The hospital made him nervous, and at first he watched for Death almost obsessively. When he didn't see it, he reasoned that Death might simply be too busy here to bother with him.

He mentioned none of this to his mother, of course; she wanted only to hear about his life and accomplishments. So he sat in her sunny, depressing hospital room and shared these things with her, omitting the fact that his name had changed half a dozen times since she had given birth to him. Her nurse came and went, smiling at him when he made his mother smile. He was warmed by her approval, but she reminded him of all the smiling young women who had strolled in and out of his revolving-door life. Her presence depressed and uplifted at once, making Reedy suppose he knew what riding a roller-coaster was like though, of course, he'd never been on one.

He spent two weeks in Sacramento, visiting his mother daily, keeping his eyes open for Death. Every time the door of her room swung open, he expected to see it standing there in the hall, but it never appeared. There would only be his mother's doctor with his kind detachment, or his mother's nurse with her sweet smile and cheerful words, and Reedy began to wonder if Death was only visible to those it was about to take.

He asked his mother, "Do you see anyone else in the room, Mom? Besides me?"

She looked at him oddly. "I see my doctors when they're here. I see my nurse."

He glanced at the nurse, who was sorting medications into a little cup. Her name tag said "Layli." An unusual name. A pang of something like grief struck

Reedy's heart and he almost blurted aloud that she should change her name to something bland, something ordinary like Mary, or Ellen or Ann, so that Death wouldn't be so quick to notice her.

She smiled at him. "It's Persian," she said, then when he couldn't reply, "My name. I saw you looking at my badge."

"It's... lovely. Unusual." He took a deep breath. Held it... and said nothing more.

His mother fell asleep as they chatted, and even Reedy dozed in his chair. He woke to find the nurse, Layli, standing over him. "It's time," she said.

"I'm sorry? I..." Reedy tried to rouse himself, but all that became aroused was his awareness of the girl. He could feel the warmth of her body, the warmth of her smile, the warmth of compassion in her eyes. She smelled sweet, like cinnamon. He'd expected antiseptic. Once, he'd perched on a stool in a sunny kitchen while his mother pulled cinnamon cookies from the oven. She would hold them up for his bright inspection and he would applaud.

"Visiting hours are over, Dr Watson."

He rose and left, feeling suddenly and overwhelmingly lonely. His father was gone. Now he would leave his mother behind... and Layli, or anyone like her.

In the lobby of the hospital, he made his way to the sliding glass doors, standing aside as a new mother was wheeled out hugging her baby to her breast. She smiled at him and, from behind her wheelchair, her husband smiled at him. They crossed the threshold and went out into the darkening parking lot. The doors slid closed with a hushed sound and Reedy stared at his own reflection in the glass. He expected to see someone old and tired-looking, but the man who gazed back was young. Too young, most people would probably say, to have a Ph.D. at the end of his name. *Does your mommy know you're wearing that beard?* he thought.

He was stepping into the beam that would part the doors when he saw another reflection behind his in the glass. He recognized it at once, despite the white doctor's coat. The doors parted, flinging the reflection to one side. Reedy turned, but it had gone.

His first thought was for his mother. He hurried back to the nurses' station and tried to get someone's attention. It seemed to take forever.

"Mrs Watson," he said when he was finally face to face with a nurse. "No, no. I mean Mrs Hammermill. Could you check her status for me?"

The woman seemed happy enough to help him; he watched her phone the nurses' station in his mother's ward. She spoke, she glanced at him, she turned away. He knew. He knew before she faced him at last and he saw the expression on her face – eyes kind but sad, mouth uncertain.

"I'm sorry, sir. Mrs Hammermill passed on about five minutes ago. Were you close?"

Yes? No? How did he answer that? Afterward, he vaguely remembered saying he was her son. Remembered receiving condolences. He hoped Layli had been with her. He hoped that if death ever did catch up with him, there would be a Layli for him, as well.

He finished his second Master's degree in Canada, then went to Florida where he taught at the University of

Miami. Then he returned to school as a student, earning a doctorate in Language. He taught college-level French in Indiana. He returned to Berkeley for his Anthropology doctorate; he went back into the field and from there into teaching again.

By the time he was 65, digression had earned him five doctorates and two additional Master's degrees. He was in excellent physical condition, for he was careful about exercise, diet and lifestyle. He was also compulsive and lonely and discontent, and envious of people who were none of those things. He wondered if he might have struck a balance in his life. He wondered if it was too late to find one now. He wondered if there might be someone, somewhere who could understand how he lived, who would be willing to share his somewhat bizarre lifestyle with him.

He'd become very good at the Dodge. He hadn't seen Death since that evening in the lobby of a Sacramento hospital, and Death had not been there for him, then. It was clear that Death had either lost interest, or did not know where he was. Sometimes, he didn't know where he was either – was this Maine or Canada? Florida or California? Arizona or Mexico?

Boston, Massachusetts. That was where he was this particular evening. He was Dr Joseph Parry, professor of History at Boston College. He was in his favourite restaurant, alone, staring at the lights of the city laid out beyond and below the windows. There was also reflected light in the windows, thrown from the myriad table-top candles. It was hard to distinguish one from the other. He was making a game of that when he saw Death reflected in the glass.

It was sitting in a booth across the room. It was watching him. Its black suit and shirt made the featureless face seem unnervingly pasty as if all the colour had drained away into the kaleidoscopic tie. Reedy sat, lump in his throat, wondering what to do and feeling suddenly and excruciatingly weary.

Perhaps, he thought, *I should just go over and introduce myself. Perhaps, I should just get this over with. And perhaps*, he thought, not for the first time, *I'm completely mad and that is just a curious stranger.*

Survival instinct clamoured for him to leave, but he could only sit there and stare at Death and wait for his dinner to arrive. Fight or flight. Adrenaline surged, making his heart race. *Get up and leave*, the rhythm said. *Get up and leave.*

He was at the point of doing just that, when movement close at hand startled him. He looked up to see a young woman sliding into the booth across from him. She was a stranger, young, lovely. She smiled at him, and her face took on a strange familiarity.

"Hello, doctor," she said.

His heart pounded with a new awareness – Death had risen and was moving toward him. He saw it peripherally, for he couldn't take his eyes from the woman sitting across from him. In that moment, she was every woman he had ever gazed at longingly and left behind on his mad zig-zag through life. If loneliness were his personal disease, she was the cure. He forgot about Death and focused his attention on her.

"Do I know you?" he asked.

"Yes and no. We've met before, but you don't remember me."

He returned her smile. "I'd like to rectify that." He held out his hand. "I'm Dr Joseph Parry."

She took the hand. "You're Dr Reed Watson."

No. It simply could not be. That was so many years ago. "Are you... Layli? You *can't* be Layli."

"It's a name I've used." She held his hand between her own, eyes soft, wistful.

It was an odd thing to say, and it struck him with forcible certainty that she, like him, was a fugitive from Death. He felt so strange. Light-headed, transfixed. Her eyes, direct, all-knowing, pulled words from him. "You're like me, aren't you? You know what this life is like. I sensed that in the hospital." So long ago, now.

"I do know. I know that you've been wretched and lonely. That you've *made* yourself wretched and lonely."

"What else could I do? I've had to—" He peered at her, suddenly perplexed. "But you... you worked in a hospital, surrounded by Death's doings. How could you do that?" And then it hit him – the simple logic of it. She had been keeping Death in plain sight rather than offering it the opportunity to sneak up on her.

This reminded him that Death was yet trying to sneak up on him. He cursed his inattentiveness and jerked his eyes from the woman's. The table across the room was empty and Death was nowhere in sight.

He relaxed, feeling leaden with relief. "It's gone. Thank God, it's gone." He looked at his companion anew. "No. Thank *you*. I believe you frightened it away."

"What?"

"Death," he said, daring to be thought mad. "It was sitting right over there."

She laughed and he wished his life had been full of that sound. Perhaps it could be yet. He felt hopeful for the first time in decades. He smiled. "You think I'm crazy. I don't blame you. But it's true. Death came here for me."

She nodded. "Yes. Death *did* come here for you." She leaned toward him, her scent like the remembered fragrance of cinnamon cookies baking in his mother's kitchen. "I'm Death, Reedy."

He shook his head, and the room turned slightly on its axis. "But you're... you're beautiful, warm. Death is stark and faceless. It has glaciers for eyes."

"That wasn't Death."

"Then what?"

"Loneliness. I am Death. Where I go, Loneliness flees. You never knew me, Reedy. Know me, and you will never meet Loneliness again."

His heart trip-hammered. The restaurant melted into an overly warm blur of shadow and light and muted sound. Reedy saw only her eyes, the eyes of Layli – twin lights that beckoned. He breathed a last breath and inhaled the sweet fragrance of cinnamon cookies.

Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff is a rising American writer whose stories have appeared in *Analog*, *Amazing* and elsewhere. She is the author of four fantasy novels (the most recent is *The Spirit Gate*, Baen Books, 1997), and she lives in Grass Valley, California.

"Doctor Dodge" is her first story for *Interzone*.

HE WAS NEAR EXHAUSTION WHEN HE CAME OVER THE crest of Mount Field, but being familiar with the valley over which he looked he knew it was only two more hours to the car park at the entrance to the National Park. It was then an hour's drive into Hobart, and a further 30 seconds to be famous, for he would telephone the press to meet him on his arrival.

"Where are you going, Leo?" his mother had asked.

"Camping."

"Where? How long for?"

"I don't know, Mum. Few weeks maybe. Don't worry about me."

"Well, just make sure you're back for the holiday weekend. We need you here."

He had left then to trek through the inland hills, though he only planned to stay away for two weeks. Now after three weeks even his emergency rations had gone, and he almost thought he should have told his mother where he was going so that by now they would be searching for him with helicopters. He shrugged, tightened his belt and heaved on the sledge which carried his precious quarry. With the weight, his hunger, and the sluggishness of his snow shoes he laughed to himself, "two hours to the car park! On a nice summer day, maybe. In these conditions I'll be lucky to get there by dark." That would be in three hours, but once he made the ski trails he could easily continue even if darkness beat him.

The trails started at Museum Lodge, which he could see about a kilometre away and 300 metres below him. It was actually an abandoned old ski-hut called "the museum" because the skiers who built it in the early part of the century had left some of their broken paraphernalia and photographs on the walls. They were curiosities now and people trekked there just to see them, curious, as people are, about useless things on display.

It would be a careful crawl to the lodge over the craggy slope. He planned to lower the sledge before him, letting it down the steepest sections and pushing it when necessary, but when on the first drop he slipped, the sledge careered into a tree and a startled yelp came from the cage it carried. Leo swore and looked in to check the condition of his captives – a male and female pair of thylacines – a species the world believed to be extinct for 70 years.

Thalacinus cynocephalus – called by the white men Tasmanian Wolf or Tasmanian Tiger – describing it by comparison before they killed it. It was a wolf-like marsupial with a fox-like face, they said; carnivorous and savage, though the stripes on its back were more regular than the tiger's. Leo had captured a breeding pair, probably the only two thylacines still in existence, and being a conservationist he was taking them home to look after them.

The going was tougher and slower than he had hoped, for the snow was fresh and deep, and the forest thick. He was still only half way to Museum Lodge when he noticed the beginnings of the approaching storm. He was anxious, for blizzards here can develop in minutes, with visibility zero and the temperature plummeting.

AT MUSEUM LODGE

George Jenner

He could set up his tent for himself, but it was too small to shelter the animals as well, and their well-being was paramount. He pushed ahead as quickly as he could, ignoring the yelps from the uncomfortable animals, trying to get as close as possible to Museum Lodge while he could still see, accepting that they might have to spend a hungry night inside. The weather held for an hour, which was as much as he could hope for, allowing him to reach within 200 metres of the Museum before visibility was reduced to zero. He took a compass bearing and struggled on, hoping at least to make it before the animals froze, not looking forward to a hungry night in that cold old cabin.

The blizzard soon kicked up a gear and he was pushing against driving wind and snow. The existence of light mocked him for he could see nothing, but it kept his spirits alight – until it faded completely. He nearly panicked, thinking he had gone past the Lodge, but he noticed the absence of trees around him and the level ground ahead which sank under the weight of his foot – he was at the edge of the lake on which it stood, only ten metres to his right, but invisible. He wanted to fall on the steps in exhaustion, but the animals must be freezing and had to be tended. He pulled the cage off the sledge and dragged it onto the landing, opened the door to the hut and pulled them inside the dark, silent, deserted and now isolated lodge. It wasn't very cold though, and Leo turned to see some dying embers in the fire place. He turned to his pack to find a torch and almost jumped out of his skin when a small voice asked from the darkness, "Dad? Is that you?"

"Who's there?"

"It's me, Kevin. I can't see you, Dad."

"I'm sorry, but I'm not your father." Leo found his torch and shone it around the cabin to rest on the face

of a small boy, perhaps ten years old, lying uncovered on one of the beds near the fire.

"My leg's broken," said the boy. "My Dad's gone for help." "How long ago?"

"About ten o'clock this morning." He groaned in obvious pain as he turned, trying to see Leo beyond the tiny glare of the torch. "He left lots of firewood but I can't move any more. I'm very cold."

Leo restarted the fire, using enough fuel to give some light and warmth, but being cautious. Leo was always cautious in the bush, unlike Kevin's father.

"You have no food at all?" asked Leo annoyed at their carelessness.

"We were just going out for the morning. We were on our way back to the car park."

"But it's the middle of winter. Anything could happen." He regretted his acrimony, for anything had happened, and he had to make the boy more comfortable. He made a splint for the leg using one of the old wooden snow-skis tied to the wall and gave the boy some of the analgesic he carried.

With the fire, the splint, the drugs and the company, the boy was nearly cheerful. Finally, though, he asked the question Leo was hoping he wouldn't. "Have you got any food?"

"No."

"Nothing at all?"

"I've been camping for three weeks. I only meant to be out for two, so I've even eaten all my emergency stuff."

"Oh."

"Horrible stuff, anyway. You didn't miss anything."

"What have you got in that crate? I can hear something."

"Just some animals I trapped."

"Yeah? What kind?"

Leo said nothing, hoping to keep the identity of the animals secret from the boy. But Kevin was not interested in Leo's fame, and if Leo had not been a vegetarian he might have anticipated the next question about his precious thylacines.

"What kind of animal are they? Maybe we can eat them."

The blizzard blew violently through the night, but the cabin was solid and whatever rattled kept its place. Yet when morning came there was little respite; the wind had subsided slightly, but the snow was heavy and visibility was very poor. It was only five kilometres to a telephone, but given these conditions and terrain, they may as well have been 500. All Leo could do was keep the fire stoked and give plenty of water to the boy and the thylacines. He dragged the crate over to where Kevin could see the animals.

Like all Tasmanians, all he had seen of the thylacine was the drawing on the labels of Cascade Beer and a jerky black-and-white film of a wild beast pacing its small cage in a zoo in the 1930s. That beast was thought to be the last of its kind, and the occasional reports of sightings were treated like those of bunyips and Elvis, for there was no hard evidence; no photographs, no bones, no droppings. But it was such a sighting by one of Leo's friends, someone he trusted, that had brought Leo out into these mountains in win-

ter. After two weeks walking with no trace he thought he should give up until summer. Then he found the footprints in the snow, and spent a hungry week silently waiting near his bait, his tranquillizer gun primed and aimed. Captured, he would take them to his parents' wildlife park near Hobart where they could be bred in safety, where their progeny could increase without fear of the dangers of the bush, and where they could be studied scientifically so that they need never disappear again.

"I'm pretty sure they are the last two in world," said Leo.

"If there's two there must be more."

"Well, maybe, but I doubt it. It's taken 70 years to find these two. Where could the others be?"

"What do they eat?"

"They eat meat. Like you," said Leo, regretting his tone immediately, for to accuse a child is to accuse nature.

At the end of the day Kevin was fevered and Leo gave him the last of his aspirin, hoping it would give the boy some comfort through the night. The pain kept Kevin's mind off food, though by now the complaints were taken up by Leo's own stomach. The blizzard, instead of lifting, worsened, as did the thylacine growls as the animals grew restless from hunger, though as night fell the complaints subsided either out of weakness or some animal version of the recognition of futility. Despondent, then, Museum Lodge eventually slept again beneath the storm.

The blizzard continued through the second day. Kevin was too weak to complain, and the animals too lay quietly in their cage, waiting for whatever the human had planned for their future. And Leo's own mind was slowing down, his thoughts always turning on his captives.

"Do you think I should let the animals go? What would become of them? Surely they know how to survive here and they could be recaptured." It was a stupid question and Kevin did not answer. Leo sat by the boy's bed thinking how ridiculous he must look. He worried, and felt the fevered brow, wondering how long they could last if the blizzard continued. He was tired and famished himself or he would have been more alarmed, for he knew now that he did not know how to survive. He had no idea what the aborigines used to eat in these hills. But everything was covered in snow, so no one and nothing could survive here, even if they could find their way. "The only thing I have is fire and snow, fire and snow."

On the third morning the blizzard continued unabated. Leo finally had to go out to replenish their firewood. Fortunately there was a generous supply near the cabin, though it was covered in much snow. Even the lake had frozen and was covered in a metre-thick white blanket. On the wall of the cabin there were pictures of people skating on that lake in the early part of the century, yet it had not frozen enough for that in living memory. "Global warming!" thought Leo. "Not bloody well here, anyway."

Most of that day Leo lay with the feverish boy, listening to the continuous rattling caused by the wind and the joints creaking under the increasing weight of snow. He no longer heard the quiet whimpering of the

animals, but when Kevin was asleep he spoke to them, transferring his fear. "My poor babies. If we don't get you something to eat soon you'll only be good for stuffing and sitting in some glass case somewhere. Like the bones of the Tasmanian aboriginals. There won't be anything dangerous left on this island. Well, except the blizzard." The animals were weak, though, and their eyes did not respond.

Leo stood and paced. He knew he should reserve his strength, but he was trapped; trapped animals pace, so Leo stalked the cabin, the light of the hunt shining in his hungry eyes.

He said, "we can survive for weeks on just water, can't we Kevin? Just water for you and me, but what about the Thylacines? How long will they last? They were skinny when I caught them, and they don't carry around the fat reserves of us city dwellers."

The light faded again outside, yet the storm continued, and the boy began to cry; slow, weak, pained sobs, the tear-streaks shining like snail trails on his cheeks in the flickering firelight.

Leo told him, "you're weak, Kevin. If you were a wild animal you wouldn't last the night. A carnivore likes nothing better than a child with a broken leg – nice tender meat, nice easy prey to catch. Why shouldn't I cut you up and feed you to the thylacines? Might even have a joint myself, I mean I wouldn't be the first cannibal made by survival in a blizzard. The stories these hills could tell!"

Kevin rolled his head and opened his eyes. He gave no sign of having understood, but asked for water. "I'm so thirsty, Leo." Leo quickly sat by him and guiltily stroked his hair as he helped him drink. "How much longer, do you think?"

"Maybe tomorrow, Kevin. Maybe tomorrow." The boy grabbed his hand and held it with what little strength he had left until he drifted once more into fevered sleep. Leo thought, "I should cut off my own arm and make a soup for you Kevin." He sighed and tended the fire, hoping he would be able to sleep.

Kevin hardly opened his eyes the following morning. None of them had eaten for four days, yet the blizzard continued. Leo looked outside in hope, but there was nothing to see but whiteness with occasional debris pushed by the wind. The load of snow on the hut made it creak. The firewood held out but Leo could no longer make the Lodge feel comfortable, fearing the collapse of his shelter. He spent the day pacing, sitting, standing, arguing with himself, cursing God, cursing people, cursing himself, and trying not to look at Kevin lying hopelessly by the fire. The animals rarely moved, and even had to be lifted for Leo to clean out their box. "It's only four days," Leo said to them. "Come on you guys. We can hold out."

For want of something to do he sat then with Kevin, holding his hand and talking quietly to the boy. When Kevin dozed Leo stood and paced the cabin, though in shorter spells as he kept returning to take the boy's hand. Eventually, though, they both slept.

On the fifth morning Leo woke, quietly angry at the continuing storm, but surrendering to its inevitability. The day passed with rapidity and without event. The snow, the wind, the trap; a small world where every-

thing existed but rescue – especially the physical weakness of the boy and the animals, and the ineffable weakness of the man. And what was that weakness? The look. Almost nothing, almost entirely insubstantial, yet it placed the weight of the universe on his back, and with the passage of the day that weight bent him lower and lower until his face almost met the forlorn, helpless look in the child's eyes.

It was under that weight as night fell on that fifth day that Leo pushed his knife into the throat of the last living male thylacine, believing with his heart as he did so that he was finishing the species for ever – there would be no further reprieve.

He was inexperienced with butchering, so unfortunately he lost a lot of the animal's blood. He kept the pelt intact and carefully cut around the scrotum so the testicles would be unharmed, and these he packed in ice, his only hope now that they would stay fresh until their eventual rescue, and the seed therein might be used to inseminate the female. After the slaughter he made Tasmanian Tiger soup, feeding the broth to the boy, a little fatty meat to himself, and the bones and marrow to the starving female thylacine, who gobbled her mate's remains joyously, and soon had the strength and enthusiasm to cry for more.

Kevin woke brighter on the sixth day of the blizzard. He asked for more food, yet could not understand the dolorous way Leo fed him. One man and one boy had been saved at the cost of a species. It was foolish to turn it into an equation, or a statement of comparative worth; Leo knew this, but it was for him an inexpressibly distasteful meal.

The helicopter arrived on the seventh morning, waking them from their dreary sleep. Leo saw blue sky through the cracks in the window shutters and realized the storm had passed, the only sound now being the fluttering of the approaching helicopter. He opened the door with difficulty, the snow having built up overnight, and there was a huge snow drift between them and where the helicopter must land on the frozen lake. Leo was near exhaustion, having eaten virtually nothing for five days, nursing constantly his charges, so instead of trying to make it to the clear ground from where he could signal, he made sure the fire was smoking so that the helicopter would know they were there. Kevin was still feverish but, being aware of the possible rescue, able to smile dimly.

The thylacine had vomited in her cage, disgorging the last of her mate either in disgust, illness or sadness. Leo reached in and petted the thylacine's head. He said to her, "you'll be safe soon, and I'll be able to watch out for you. You'll never need to join the slaughter."

He began to dig away at the snow that was blocking their exit, and soon a voice called, "Kevin! Kevin are you in there?"

George Jenner last appeared in *Interzone* with "Two Dollars" (issue 83). He lived in Luxembourg for some years, where he wrote both that last story and the above piece, but has recently returned to his native Australia.

I've always felt, no doubt wrongly, that there are two secrets to understanding David Lynch, either one of which he would rather eat his own teeth than admit. The first, and darker, is the formative and enduring influence of (deep breath) Frank Herbert. From looking back at interviews and makings-of before release and disillusion, it's clear that for three years Lynch genuinely fell in love with the man and his work, and that *Dune* is a far more central work in the Lynch canon than anyone, including its maker, would nowadays wish to acknowledge: the project that gave the youthful hireling his taste for densely novelistic narrative on an epic scale, woven out of enormous casts of exotic characters that defy the economy of cinema to present. It's this, I think, that's missed by those who still feel *Blue Velvet* is Lynch's supreme achievement. The *Twin Peaks* saga, and especially its culmination in *Fire Walk with Me*, enabled an epic width of canvas and richness of texture far beyond the reach of other movie authors; and the immensity of story preinvested in each character in the sprawling cast allowed the *Peaks* movie to offer the kind of novelistic narrative richness that even *Wild at Heart*, with its epic running time and meandering picaresque of character cameos, could only approximate. In this light, it's tempting to see Lynch's cinematic fallow period post-*Peaks* as a sign of disenchantment with the narrative limitations of the movie monodrama, and his whole trajectory after *Velvet* as an attempt to explore the collusive possibilities, first with TV and latterly with the novel, for kinds of scale, complexity, and hoopla that mere cinema is poorly equipped to deliver. And though the canvas this time may be a bit more scaled-down, *Lost Highway* is surely Lynch's most novelistic film yet – playing with time and voice in a wildly-unAmerican fusion of the devices of novel and film not seen since Robbe-Grillet got into bed with Resnais.

The second thing is Lynch's radically bottom-up writing method. I don't even know whether his last two, co-written films have continued to use his trademark index-card system (which the director himself has been shy to discuss, though others around him haven't): collecting scene ideas on a set of 3x5s and unshuffling them into a script once he has enough for a deck. *Wild at Heart*, the extreme case, began from a novel that itself was already little more than a pack of randomized scenes and character routines. It's a great recipe for a visionary, directorly cinema of perpetual surprise; what it's not so hot at is anything resembling coherent narrative. As you'd expect from someone used to assembling

MUTANT POPCORN



NICK LOWE

storylines out of incidents and images rather than vice-versa, Lynch isn't a man to whom plots come easily. The main limitation of his mature work is that, left to himself, he only has the one master narrative, of which the centre section of *Lost Highway* is a particularly by-numbers incarnation: the boyish ingenu sucked into a dark relationship with a fascinating but self-destructive vamp, herself the victim of a terrifying older male abuser who incarnates the heart of darkness at the source of the plot, and with whom the young hero finds himself unequally pitted. I used to feel, like many others, that this fixation with the spectacle of abused women was a sign of darkness and dodginess, but it's clearer than ever in *Lost Highway* that if anything the reverse is true: that Lynch's imagination for evil is essentially rather limited, and that he only really has one concrete manifestation of absolute darkness in his repertoire, which is a bit of a problem if that's what you're making movies about.

So *Lost Highway* is a film born of, and on one of its levels about, the relationship of collaboration on which Lynch increasingly relies for elements of variability to make individual products sufficiently distinct: two men's stories, beginning from quite different places and genres, twining around one another until they fuse into something inexplicably one. The partnership with neo-Beat novelist Barry Gifford is itself a peculiar replay of a kind of relationship all Lynch's later work is centred on: begun in violence, but flowering perversely into mutual fascination, dependence, and finally paradoxical

sympiosis. Initially aghast at what Lynch's script for *Wild at Heart* did to his original novel, Gifford nevertheless became an ardent fan of the final film, and wound himself ever-deeper into Lynch's projects post-*Peaks*, quickly occupying the niche vacated by Mark Frost after the creative, critical and commercial collapse of the Lynch-Frost production machine. Lynch likes to be the centrifugalizing force in these binary systems: mystifying, obfuscating, and confounding rational narrative in dynamic tension with a centripetal, rational partner who works to pull things back together. On the face of it, it's a kind of relationship you'd expect to end in tears. Certainly *Twin Peaks* bifurcated, after the genuinely-collaborative first series, into two separate and divergent projects with imperfectly-reconcilable agendas: the second TV series, largely controlled by Frost apart from the couple of Lynch-directed episodes, and the *Fire Walk with Me* movie, from which Frost was entirely excluded. Yet the Gifford collaboration has already lasted longer, and on the evidence of *Lost Highway* has plenty of mileage to go.

One creative irony in this synergy of novelist and cinematist is the role-swap between the two players' storylines at the point where the creators turn into one another. Though the textures suggest the reverse, the powerfully-Lynchian Bill Pullman segment is actually a Gifford story, and it's the wilder-at-heart Balthazar Getty section that's a retread, verging on self-parody, of the archetypal Lynch storyline. The master key to *Lost Highway* – though I haven't seen anyone point this out – is the first of three pilot episodes, unscreened in the UK, for Lynch's stillborn 1992 TV series *Hotel Room*, which Gifford scripted in his first consenting get-into-bed with the director. In Gifford's "Tricks" episode, Harry Dean Stanton has a tryst with a hooker intercepted by his pal Freddie Jones, whose reminiscences about his wife are eerily claimed afterwards by Stanton to be a bizarre confabulation, the wife being actually Stanton's own.

After Jones and the unnerved hooker have both left, the police arrest Stanton for his wife's murder, of which he has no recollection, and it emerges that the Jones character is a fragment of Stanton's own personality. This is so clearly the seed for the first-act plot and the Pullman character's relationship with his other selves, particularly the uncanny Mystery Man who seems more and more to be a facet of his own personality, that it comes close to spoiling the enigma altogether. Gifford himself has been more forthcoming than Lynch about how *Lost Highway*'s mysteries might be unravelled, endorsing a reading that makes Pullman's metamorphosis into Getty and whole subsequent

narrative a “psychogenic fugue” (Gifford’s term) by Pullman in his death cell, just as the earlier Pullman section is a confabulated memory of the events leading up to the murder. (“I like to remember things my own way,” Pullman tells the cops in the film’s most planted line: “how I remember them, not necessarily how they happened.”) But this is such an easy, and comparatively uninteresting, reading that even Gifford admits that elements of the narrative have been twisted to undermine it in a kind of dynamic mystification. Thus the careful objectification of the Getty segment, with the law-enforcer chorus lending third-party credence to what would otherwise threaten to seem like a subjective confabulation; thus the artful hints of alternative (though not irreconcilable) solutions, none of which is quite complete.

The result, for the most part, is top-drawer Lynch, full of trademark images and truly fabulous frissons: the Mystery Man scenes, the impossible lights across the curtains as the Pullmans arrive home from the party, Getty’s fragments of flashback to whatever happened on the missing night that his parents and best girl won’t bring themselves to tell. The wall-to-wall sound design is, as ever, unlike anyone else’s, with Badalamenti’s music blending seamlessly into a pervasive white-noise underscore like a relaxation tape from hell, letting up only in the momentary fades to black. I still don’t much like the amount of nudity and grinding demanded of Lynch’s leading blondes, though I suppose you could charitably mark it up as part of the fundamentally-adolescent take on the world of sex and evil that Lynch’s products and persona define themselves by, and

which seems, for better and worse, to be largely sincere. Otherwise, this is as weird as great movies get, and a wonderful reminder of what film can do in the hands of those few psycho drivers – Cronenberg is another – who’ve been right through Hollywood and way, way out the other side.

Perhaps it’s magnified by their coming out the same day, but there are eerie siblinghoods between *Lost Highway* and the more conventional genre evocation of the darkness beyond the world in *Event Horizon*. If Lynch’s film is unlike anything seen before, Paul Anderson’s does just as creditable a job of being like everything you’ve ever seen at once, and particularly all other classic sf movies located in that curious corner of a future starfield that is forever Pine-wood – where every accent is either English or American, and there are full quotas of Caucasians and African-Americans in the global space navy but mysteriously never an Asian or Hispanic in sight. It’s to the film’s credit that even this feels less like the customary feeble exhumation of the bones of a dozen dead movies than an intelligent, purposeful stirring of deep nostalgia for a particular kind of classical genre movie. The films it most vividly summons up from the past are the most specifically Brit-accented of blockbusters – *Alien*, *Hellraiser* and *2001* rather than *Star Wars* or *Trek* or anything touched by Spielberg – and part of the charm of the resultant disarming tosh is its conscious attempt to reinvent the mid-Atlantic space thriller for the 90s.

There’s just enough dash of E in the vaguely-ravey warehouse sets, and just enough Orbital and Prodigy tripping up the Michael Kamen main

score, to catch a touch of the beat of swinging England, while the credits harbour unlikely cameos by all kinds of resting local talent: Vadim Jean (in purgatorio for *Beyond Bedlam*, as well he might be) does a unit, and there’s even a dialogue editor called Nick Lowe trying to capitalize on a famous name.

Top respect, though, is due to local boy Paul Anderson, plainly a lad on his way up fast: rewarded here for making it through *Mortal Kombat* by graduating to the next level where he’s allowed both a budget and a near-adequate script. And the investment pays, because *Event Horizon* is, in its professionally self-effacing and uninsistent way, phenomenally well directed. The quality cast of B-list stars and D-list upcomers speak some very silly dialogue with uncanny conviction (including some mongrel dog-Latin that makes *Xena* look like a monument to philological rigour); and a plot dredged from the wastes of hell and populated by ghosts of dead memories manages to feel fresh, exciting, and (gulp) rather evocative in its thrillingly old-fashioned cocktail of big dumb object, *Mary Celeste* in space, and an amorphous blight of nethermost confusion bubbling and blaspheming on the other side of the Stargate. It’s all here: the datelined prologue exposition with things like “2032: deep mining begins on Mars” (a detail of no discernible relevance to anything in the actual film); Prof. Sam Neill’s briefing on the secret mission (i.e. the plot), reciprocating a round of formal introductions to the cast; the prowling round dark spaces in maximally-vulnerable teams of one. (“OK,” barks Col. Fishburne: “we do it the hard way – deck by deck, room by room!”)

Much of the appeal of *Event Horizon* is the reassuring comfort of the



straitjacket, with a pick-'em-off plot that complies scrupulously with the seven laws of expendability.

(i) Characters are wasted in the order that the writers run out of ideas for them. This closely matches the reverse order of their appearance in the opening credits.

(ii) To conform with tokenism quotas, survivors may include no more than one woman and no more than one person of colour.

(iii) If two women are competing for survival, delete the less attractive. Attractiveness as here defined correlates less closely than with acting ability or well-writtenness than with hair length. In any tie-break, blonde beats henna. Note that only unattached females may be regarded as attractive.

(iv) Parenthood guarantees invulnerability if the child appears in the cast, destruction otherwise. Anyone who muses aloud on seeing offscreen loved ones again won't. Sorry, but it's the rules.

(v) Nobody with a wussy name, e.g. Justin, is even in the running.

(vi) No way on earth or beyond is anyone going to waste Joely Richardson.

(vii) In any given picture, precisely one of these laws must be purposely broken, which may of course include

this one.

It's all as old as the light from the stars, and yet the timing could hardly be sharper. Top-of-the-news dramas on Mir either side of *Event Horizon*'s release have made this kind of narrative unexpectedly current and familiar, as well as renewing public relish for the claustrophobic minimalism and strictly-functional aesthetics of space-rescue drama in general. In space, there's no dead weight: everything aboard is streamlined for narrative efficiency, down to the customization-for-plot of the *Event Horizon* itself. (Yes, they even named the ship after the movie.) "What are all those little bombs everywhere for?" a foot-soldier blatantly asks the set's creator. "Well, in an *emergency*," explains Prof. Sam with nary a blush, "they split the two halves of the ship apart, and then the foredecks can be used as a liferaft." Even less is excess baggage admitted to the characterization, which conforms rigorously to the canons of movie psychology: any self-doubt is the residue of traumatic single events in personal backstory, and the "dimension of pure chaos, pure evil" turns out to be a place whence the past lives of any character with a history outside the movie return to wreak their vengeance on the living. (Since only three of the eight charac-

ters evince any personal history whatever, it's a fair guess whose card is marked to go straight to hell.) Nothing is ever done without a dash of gratuitous suspense – waking up, opening doors – and if you want to speak to someone, you always creep up behind them when they're in closeup and lay a hand suddenly on their shoulder. This is one of those films where everything is optimized for tension, with no end of too-tight closeups and SUDDEN LOUD NOISES behind you.

Anderson's next slate is reportedly a David Peoples screenplay, and nobody could say he hasn't earned it. But there's some spooky shit on the Möbius highway that runs in and out of Hollywood, and as David Lynch heads out of town at car-chase velocity, whipping past Anderson's vehicle as its driver zooms at similar speed up the opposite carriageway into the very heart of the shadow, he might glimpse the ghost of his own younger self, that hired boy from sticksville who made *Elephant Man* and, yes, *Dune*; and reflect that, if hell is a place where the damned and the damaged replay their history over and over in an endless rerun of earlier movies, then maybe next exit is farther than anyone thinks.

Nick Lowe

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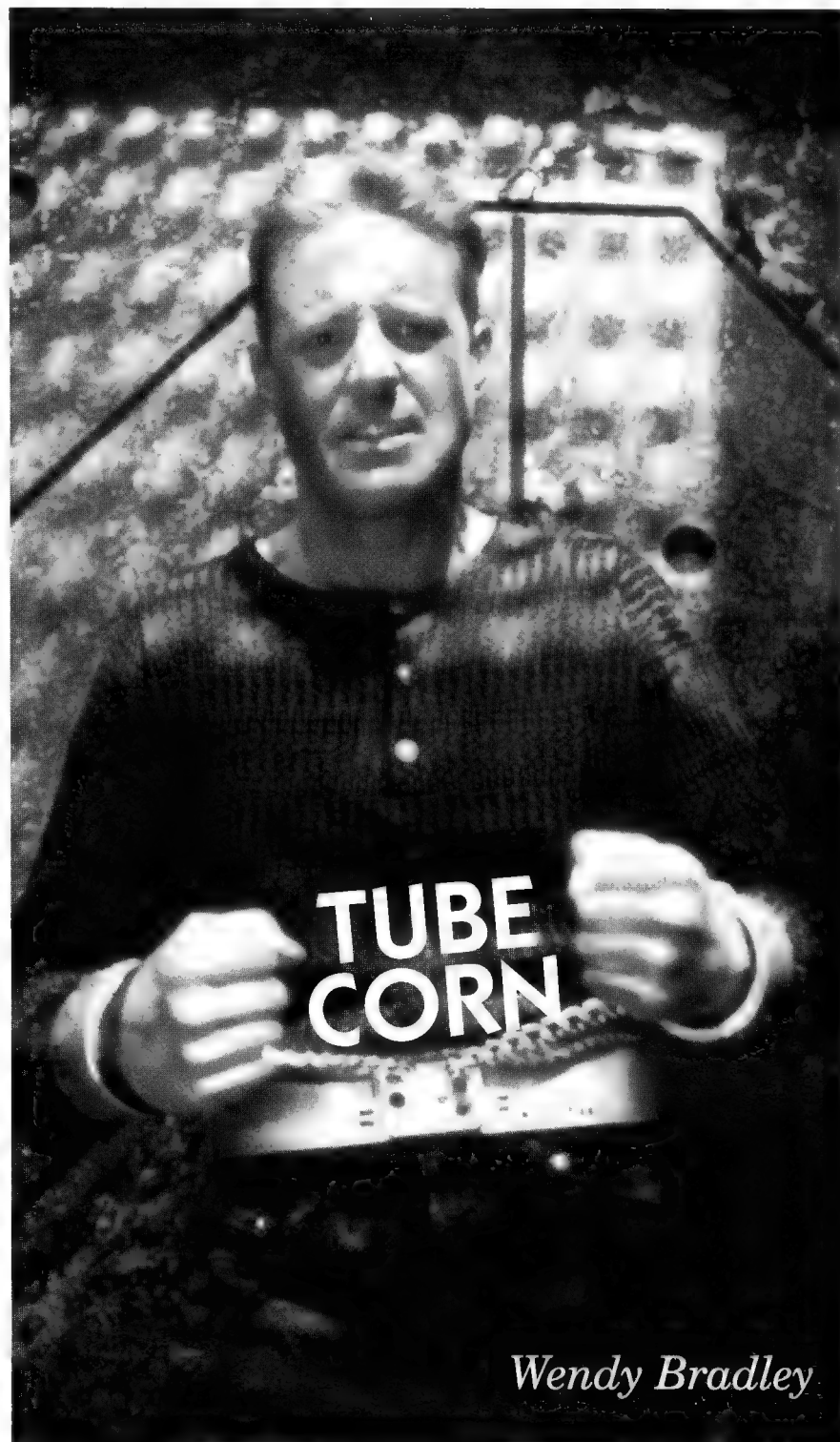
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Any consideration of *Babylon 5* has to begin with the famous five-year story arc. It is a key element of the *Babylon 5* mythos that J. Michael Straczynski had it in mind to create the equivalent of a novel: a story with a beginning, a middle and an end, in the form of five series of television programmes. This is more radical than it sounds. The common currency of television programme making is the open-ended series, where you make one pilot show, then, if you are lucky, you get commissioned to make a series and then, if you haven't been cancelled by falling ratings mid-season, you start contract discussions with your actors and writers and producers and, perhaps, if everyone plays the game very well and all the dice fall with the right number of spots showing, you get commissioned for a second series. Perhaps a third. Perhaps, even, a fourth fifth and sixth. And, of course, throughout all this internal politicking, any thought that you might have a coherent continuing story in mind is mere nonsense. You cut your story according to the prevailing fashions, or the respective clouts of the stars, or network policy, whatever. *Babylon 5*, though, was to have been different. Not an open-ended "fly through space and meet stuff" like *Trek*, or even "stuff flies through space and meets us" like *DS9*, but a genuine alternative universe with its own back-story and a grand sweep of plot-development coming to a satisfying conclusion over five years.

Actually, no, I never believed all that Joseph Campbell stuff about George Lucas having worked out all nine *Star Wars* movies in his head before the first one was ever made either, but it's a good story and who can prove what's going on in someone else's head? So let's accept the myth is true and the overarching story was all planned out in advance.

That said, it was still idiotic of the American networks to consider cancelling *Babylon 5* after its third series. And, perhaps, even more idiotic to commission a fourth series without making a decision on whether or not to commission the fifth. The fourth series will forever be tainted by this indecision: no matter how much Straczynski asserts he was able to work around the problem, nevertheless we will always blame any lacunae in the plots on the accountants' caution. We all noticed that the *B-5* ultimate battle between good and evil turned out to be a damp squib which fizzled away to nothing before the fourth series had got properly under way. No amount of writing around the problem will prevent people from having the platonic ideal of a different *Babylon 5* in the back of their minds, a shadow version where the pace of the plotting was not determined by some accountant sit-



ting at a desk but by the creative impulses of its creator.

However, *Babylon 5* also needed to come up with a better explanation for Sheridan's death and resurrection than "Captain: I'm sorry, we thought you were dead." "I was. I'm better now."

Well, yes, I know they did a lot of stuff about life's existing in the instant between tick and tock, but I was laughing too hard to take any of that in. Let's recap: Sheridan jumped off a cliff, a spaceship landed on his head, and then the spaceship exploded because it was full of nukes. Now call me cynical but I find it hard to accept that "I woke up in a cave with some bloke wearing a tiara going on about tick and tock" is an

acceptable explanation. I also found "I was. I'm better now." to have too many echoes of the Pythons' "She turned me into a newt. I got better."

In fact, as well as worrying about Sheridan's improbable resurrection, I find I also spend a lot of time worrying if Bruce Boxleitner, the actor who plays him, is, well, up to the task. I know that most people are not cursed with the same retentive memory for bad television that I have and that most people will not, therefore, find their viewing haunted in quite the same way by the ghosts of *The Scarecrow* and *Mrs King* and *Bring 'Em Back Alive*, but even taking Boxleitner as a semi-cute stand-alone actor I worry

about his capacity to fill the role. Or else it isn't his ability which is the problem but the godawful lines he keeps being given. I mean, even John Wayne would have had trouble with "Get the hell out of this galaxy," no?

There is some decent acting in the series, particularly if you consider the actors playing Londo and G'Kar, characters who have grown in stature as the show has progressed so that they have had some moments of genuine pathos and power. However, the mixture keeps being diluted by their surroundings: Londo's clichéd aristocrat-bad was developing into something noble until we met up with mad Emperor Cartagia and moved into comic-opera territory. A court ruled by a mad Emperor ought to feel far more paranoid and claustrophobic. It doesn't necessarily depend on money (although it doesn't help if your court is populated by two Ruritania Guards) but *I, Claudius* managed to pull off the trick perfectly well with a ration of BBC extras. And, look, I know it's irrelevant but I'm still bothered by G'Kar's chains. No, listen, he made a "look at me being noble and crucified" appearance at Cartagia's court wearing chains on his wrists attached to a yoke around his neck. He did the superhuman-feat-of-strength/with-one-bound-he-was-free thing and broke the chains – and then took the yoke

off. Well, if the yoke would just come off over his head anyway, why did he need to break the chains at all? I know, I know, but I can't help it, I'm a critic – that's the way my mind works.

And on the subject of how my mind works, well, I have to say it, but what about the women? Is it *likely* that *all* non-human races would also be patriarchal? Well, is it? No, but all of them, really? I know Delenn is a serious character and she's a girl, but she appears to be the only female Minbari in the entire universe. All the other female characters are human and they all fit the same old stereotypes: the Russian bitch queen, the girly telepathic one. And then there is Ivanova and the disposable bimbo issue: due to some contractual problems that for some reason couldn't be overcome we are apparently going to lose Ivanova in the fifth series and, apparently, there again will be no problem in writing around this issue either. But you can't help a sneaking suspicion that if it had been one of the blokes they might have tried a little harder to avoid another trip to central casting.

The special effects? I quite like the CGI spaceships, and I acknowledge they're cutting-edge (or at least the first series was) but in the climactic battle scenes I had trouble working out what ship was trying to do what

to which – not tremendously helpful. Maybe it's a "boys and their toys" thing: we can do a zillion spaceships at once, so let's; who cares whether it makes sense or adds anything to the plot. Or maybe space battles would just really *be* like that – but if that were true the commanders would need some higher-tech way of controlling the action than sitting in a chair barking orders in bad Minbari – something like the "tank" they use in the *Lensman* series of books springs to mind. Now that *would* be cutting-edge to see.

Conclusions? *B-5* is no longer the "must see" it started out as, but the narrative thread will certainly keep us watching to the end of season five. Can't imagine wanting to watch the putative spin-offs much, though, once the will to find out what happened next is satisfied.

And finally, deliberate-error-spotter's corner: yes, Jonathan Brandis spells his name thus and not with an e – sorry, EvilLucasFans everywhere. And the priest from *Poltergeist* was in an advert for Caffreys and not Guinness. E-mail wbradley@easy.net.co.uk if you spot any further bloopers! TV companies with upcoming programmes to plug are welcome to e-mail me the details too.

Wendy Bradley

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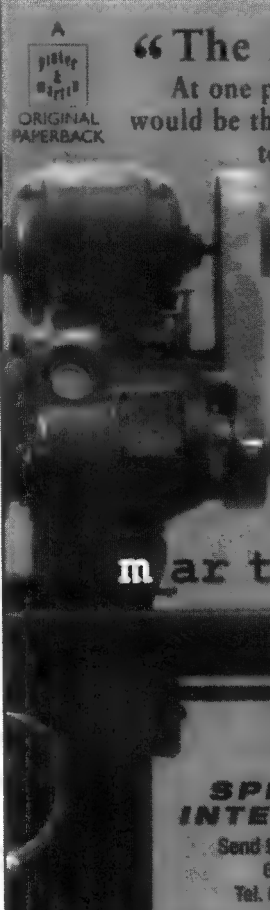
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Bright, Bright as Day

S

SO FAR, THE SÉANCE HAD GONE as Dr Alison Leonard expected. Though the medium on the stage did not seem to be more than 20 years old, she was already highly skilled at exploiting the credulity of her audience. No doubt it didn't hurt that she had a pretty, heart-shaped face framed by curly brown hair. Her name was Melanie Eglinton and she wore an ankle-length white dress, which Alison thought pretentious. She was accompanied by her aunt – or was it her mother? – a large plump woman in black, who occasionally called Melanie's attention back to the audience when the girl appeared to drop too deeply into her trance. The room at the community centre was about three-quarters full, not bad for an icy night in late winter, and the folding metal chairs on which the audience were sitting creaked from time to time as they shifted position. Melanie and her companion were seated in the same type of chairs on a splintery wooden stage decorated only by dusty red velvet curtains. Fluorescent lights glared down. This is a very prosaic place to call up the dead, Alison thought, trying to smooth a wrinkle in the skirt of her tweed suit. "Look," Gudrun whispered in Alison's ear, "she's going to do it now, what I told you about."

Jennifer Swift

If Gudrun had not been Alison's favourite graduate student, Alison would certainly not have come, she reflected. But even though Gudrun had agreed when Alison said that most mediums were frauds, her student had insisted there was something special about this Melanie Eglinton. And Alison had not wanted her student to know that despite being a parapsychologist, she had never been to a séance. So now Alison was sitting warily in the audience, telling herself to keep cool and collected, that it had been seven years.

"There's an old man," the medium said. "He's close to someone near. He has blue eyes, I think, and a ring – it's thick gold. Must be a wedding ring. He's got a moustache, a white one. His name begins with A, it seems, Allen, no, maybe just Al –"

"Albert!" An elderly woman seated near Alison and Gudrun got to her feet. Supplying the information like that certainly makes the medium's job easier for her, Alison thought. And the vague description wasn't very impressive either. In an audience of 60 or so people, many must know some old man like that, especially considering a lot of the people here seem to be pensioners. So far it's just like what I've heard about cold reading techniques – the medium is working the audience to give her details which she then feeds back to them. Why did Gudrun think this girl was exceptional?

The medium did not respond to the elderly woman's cry; she continued to sit with her face turned up towards the ceiling and her eyes closed. "There's someone here who knows Albert, dear," the plump woman said gently.

"How are you, darling?" the woman in the audience said, smiling but wringing her hands together. Alison's stomach had become queasy. I really should have stayed home to prepare that lecture –

"The spirit is at rest," the girl said. "He's happy, but he wants you to know that he still cares for you."

As far as mediums are concerned, Alison thought, all the dead are happy. Even the suffering of the living can't mar their happiness, despite their alleged concern for us. She looked down at the fountain pen in her right hand and saw her knuckles had turned white as she clutched it. "Albert, can you tell me something?" the woman in the audience asked. "Where's Jacksie?"

Ha, thought Alison, is she referring to a human or an animal?

Melanie Eglinton's head dropped to one side, until it was resting on her left shoulder. Her eyes were still closed and she sighed. The woman in black looked at her anxiously and patted her hand. The audience straightened in their seats, straining forward. How many guesses is it going to take? Alison thought. "I can see a dog now," the girl said softly. "I can see him wagging his tail."

The eyes of the woman in the audience had turned shiny; she seemed about to burst into tears. "When he ran away after you died, Albert, I should have known he'd gone to join you," she said, sinking down into her seat.

"See what I told you?" Gudrun whispered to Alison. "She doesn't fish around, she usually gets the answer right the first time."

"That was a fairly easy guess," Alison replied. "She wouldn't have hit it so readily if their dog had been named Fred."

But now the medium's eyes were open and she was surveying the audience. They were large dark brown eyes, and her expression was gentle and sad. She looked right at a young man in a shabby black leather jacket, who was sitting in the second row. "Steve has a message for you," she said.

Even though most of the audience must have been to séances before, there was still a collective gasp. Gudrun turned to Alison and smiled, nodding her head so that her earrings jingled.

The young man stared up at the medium, his mouth open. "Are you really here, Steve?"

The medium's eyes flickered shut and when she replied, her voice had lowered in pitch and her accent had shifted from a classless, neutral one to strong East Midlands. "Sure, it's me. We had a lot of good times together, didn't we?" I would have thought it's rather old-fashioned to alter one's voice like that, Alison thought, but none the less it's dramatically effective.

"I hope you didn't suffer, Steve," the young man said. "When you were in the hospital after the accident, I mean. You seemed to be unconscious."

The medium nodded. "I saw you sitting there, Ray," she said. There was another slight gasp from the audience. "You were beside my bed. But don't worry, I wasn't in pain. I wasn't even in my physical body any longer. I was floating above you, looking down at it."

Alison swallowed. Still, she thought, this medium hasn't said anything that couldn't be easily extrapolated from what the boy in the audience has told her, and everyone these days knows about out-of-the-body experiences.

The young man was on his feet now, leaning forward and staring at the medium as if he expected ectoplasm to start streaming from her body and assume the form of his dead friend. "Steve," the boy said, "I'm really sorry about the accident. I know the police said it was the other driver's fault, but I should have been watching to see if anyone was turning right –"

"I don't want you feeling guilty, Ray," the medium said, in the peculiar gravelly voice she had adopted. "I was knocked out when my head hit the windscreen, so I never felt any pain and I'm free now. But for my sake, could you just do one thing?"

The boy nodded, open-mouthed. Despite the fact the room was well-heated and her tweed suit was warm, Alison shivered. This girl undoubtedly has exceptional stage presence, she thought, but does she really have a paranormal talent? The medium spoke again: "When you drive, be very careful."

"Oh, I will, Steve, I will." Ray was sinking down in his chair.

"And give my love to Mummy and Liz," the medium added. An elderly woman seated in front of Alison sniffed loudly and dabbed at her eyes with a crumpled tissue.

A soft buzz filled the hall as people began to whisper to their neighbours. "You see why she's special?" Gudrun asked Alison. "I think she must be a telepath. How else could she have known those names and the details of the accident?"

Gudrun's reaction, Alison thought, must stem from the fact that mediums are highly respected in Iceland, so my student's cultural background is leading her

astray. She said to Gudrun, "The simplest explanation is that boy's a plant, a confederate of those two on the stage."

Gudrun pursed her scarlet-painted lips. "But then wouldn't they have cooked up some even more amazing revelations?"

"Or there could be someone working for her out here, someone who overheard the boy's name, and something about his dead friend," Alison went on, determined not to be another in the long line of academic parapsychologists duped by clever con artists.

"But her eyes are usually closed."

"That woman who keeps squeezing her hand could be passing some sort of code to her."

The medium, who had been silent for a few minutes, possibly to let the effect of her trick sink in, suddenly spoke again, this time in her normal voice. "There's a little girl here," she said.

Alison shivered again. "She's got light brown hair and hazel eyes," the medium continued. Many many people have that colouring, Alison reminded herself. "She knows her mother's here," the medium said. Alison's stomach was hurting again.

"She wants to speak to her Mama," the medium said. Alison sank a little lower in her chair, but out of the corners of her eyes she saw that no one had responded to the medium's overtures on behalf of this new spirit. Nor did Gudrun seem to have made the connection. I shouldn't be so sensitive, Alison thought, there's no way that girl up on the stage could be referring to me.

"Her name begins with F, perhaps it's Faith? No, it's Faye," the medium said. Alison bit her lip hard, and the pain helped keep her face neutral, or so she hoped. She was suddenly angry – what right had this girl to intrude into her life? Gudrun was staring at her now, looking both excited and rather guilty. The audience was becoming restless. "She's fading now," the medium said. "I can't see her any more." Then she opened her eyes, looked out at the people who had gathered there, and bowed her head slightly. "Thank you for coming tonight," she said. "Thank you for listening to the spirits." The spotlight on the stage faded and the dusty curtains began to creak shut.

Gudrun was still studying Alison closely. That medium must have heard my daughter's name somewhere, Alison thought. Around them people were getting to their feet, putting on coats and chatting. "Isn't Melanie Eglinton marvellous?" said the woman who had been moved to tears over the girl's performance with Ray. How did she find out about it? Alison wondered. It's not as though I've made it my business to investigate mediums, so that the local ones would tip her off. As soon as she had focused on that small mystery, Alison knew that she was strong enough to control her anger and, behind it, the grief that had been threatening to batter its way into her consciousness. She saw that Gudrun was blushing. Well, her student mustn't be allowed to think that this medium could hold sway over Alison's emotions. "The girl's more impressive than I would have guessed," she said, getting to her feet and reaching for her coat.

Gudrun practically bounced up with what must have been relief. "Yes," she said, zipping up her parka, "that's why I think the lab ought to investigate her."

Alison almost said no, but then wondered again – how had Melanie Eglinton known about her daughter? "So you think she might be a telepath?"

Gudrun nodded vigorously. "I've seen three of her shows, Dr Leonard, and each time she's done some amazing things. She doesn't seem to fish nearly as much as the mediums I've read about, and she seems to score some amazing hits." She paused and looked down at her black leather boots. "If it's all right with you, I'm going to go and ask her if she's willing to be tested."

"You're going to send people who've been recently bereaved to her?"

"Oh no, that would be too hard to control. I was thinking of including her in the ganzfeld tests we're doing now."

Alison nodded. "I don't see any harm in that, though she's probably just a clever fraud," she said, and then realized a white-haired man was glaring at her. They moved down towards the stage, where a small knot of people surrounded the medium and her minder, asking for special advice and making appointments for private sittings. "Have you talked to her before?" Alison asked, thinking that if anyone knew who Gudrun was, then they would probably know who Alison was, and perhaps the medium had heard of her daughter that way.

Gudrun flicked a lock of long blonde hair away from her eyes. "No, I didn't think that would be wise. And I don't think she's taken special notice of me because lots of people have come to all her shows and quite a few of them are young."

"Would you be wanting an appointment with Melanie, dears?" It was the large woman, who stood in front of them, a pocket diary in one hand and a miniature pencil in the other. Gudrun smiled and stepped forward a little. "No, I have a proposal for Miss Eglinton." As always when she was self-conscious, her Icelandic accent strengthened, but Alison wondered if it wasn't because her student found it useful to seem exotic and intriguing. "I am parapsychology student, from the university. I want to –"

But Melanie had stepped over to join them. "You want to examine me in your laboratory?" she said. Her voice was husky, and she now spoke with a slight Yorkshire accent. She was clearly older than she had appeared on stage, perhaps in her mid-20s. "But my gift has been given to me to relieve the pain of mourners, not to satisfy the whims of scientists."

"Quite so, dear," said the older woman, putting a protective arm around the medium's shoulders.

"What I am wondering," Gudrun said, "is whether you have the power to contact the minds of the living. Wouldn't you like to know this?"

"I know that the spirits of the departed speak to me," the girl said, but she looked as if she might be interested.

"Of course I have to tell you that we can only pay your travel expenses and no more," Gudrun said.

The older woman frowned. "I know my darling has better things to do with her time."

Gudrun's look of disappointment and the older woman's hostility stung Alison into speech. This was really too much; she was sure the pair were making good money from private sittings. "We're interested in

whether Miss Eglinton might be a telepath,” she said. “So the experiments would have no bearing on whether or not she can contact the dead, and no direct relation to her professional work.”

The medium looked at Alison. “You are also a scientist.” It was not a question.

“Yes, that’s right,” Alison said, suddenly afraid that the girl might recognize her as the mother of Faye. “But that doesn’t mean I think it’s impossible for there to be paranormal powers. There wouldn’t be much point in doing parapsychological research if I thought that.”

The older woman was still looking hesitant, but the medium said, “When and where the spirits speak to me is purely up to them. They may choose to talk to me in your lab, or they may not. It doesn’t alter the fact they do speak to me.” So she’s making no claims about being a telepath, Alison thought, and if she can’t read minds, then there are only two possibilities – she’s a fraud or she can contact the dead.

“Would Tuesday afternoon be convenient?” Gudrun asked. “At about three o’clock?”

The large woman checked her little book. “You’re free then, dear,” she said to the girl. She was certainly old enough to be Melanie Eglinton’s mother, but Alison could not see any trace of family resemblance between the stout woman’s heavy features and the girl’s delicate ones.

The medium nodded. “Yes, Nana,” she said. “Put us down for three.” Alison glanced at Gudrun; they would have to watch out for collusion and fraud. Suddenly and almost shockingly, the medium looked directly into Alison’s eyes. “You scientists may not believe that I have the power, but you’ll see.”

Alison went home that night, but found she had difficulty sleeping, so she ended up writing her lecture after all. The next morning she was in desperate need of coffee and went into the postgraduate students’ common room to get some. Gudrun was there, crouched in an armchair, and smoking despite the fact the lounge was a no-smoking area. At least she had opened the window next to her, though the temperature outside was below freezing.

“Dr Leonard,” she said, “I’m wondering about Melanie Eglinton. Suppose we do find tomorrow that she has some power to contact the minds of people near her. But from all we know about telepathy, it doesn’t seem to be a consistent enough ability to explain all her hits.”

“The simple and by far the more probable explanation,” Alison said as she moved towards the coffee maker, “would be that she’s cheating.”

Gudrun blew a long breath of white smoke out the window and tapped the ash of her cigarette into her coffee cup. “There’s a third explanation, which is that she’s really communicating with the dead.”

There were only a few millimetres of acrid coffee left in the jug. Reminding herself that she really should get a machine for her office, Alison emptied the dregs into the sink and rinsed the jug. Her heart was beating a little fast. “Well, of course that is a possibility, but it’s such a big claim to make. Many researchers find it easier to believe that mediums are gifted telepaths than to believe that the human mind survives death.”

“Well, we have got quite a few mediums in Iceland,” Gudrun said, “and there have been careful studies of them. What do you say about the cases where mediums have given accurate information about dead persons who were unknown to the sitters? And sometimes the information could only be found by looking into the minds of several different people, so if telepathy was responsible, it would have to be a sort of super-ESP, able to reach not only into the unconscious minds of people far away, but also to collect just the right information, and then to compile it. And there are even cases where this information exists in printed records only, yet no one’s come up with any good evidence that sensitives can read closed books.”

Alison put coffee into the clean white filter paper, her hand shaking slightly. “Yes, I’ve read about those cases. But we mustn’t overlook the possibility of chance coincidence, and all that evidence is so remote from modern laboratory conditions.” She stood by the machine, bone china mug in hand, waiting for the fresh coffee to drip through.

A few snowflakes were whirling through the window. Gudrun ground out her cigarette in the bottom of her empty cup and slid the window shut. “Yes, I’ve heard such arguments,” she said, “but I don’t think they explain all the cases. What do you think, Dr Leonard?” she added, coming up to Alison. “Are all the impressive things some mediums have done simply due to luck or to fraud?”

Alison was holding the coffee jug in her hands, ready to pour herself a cup. She hesitated, looking down into the dark trembling surface of the liquid. “Since it’s not an area I’ve personally investigated, I find it hard to judge,” she said.

“But what if you saw a medium producing information that she couldn’t have obtained by normal means?” Gudrun prompted.

Alison found her throat was dry, but she still managed to speak. “I’ve read of things that mediums have done which seemingly could only be explained by the super-ESP you mentioned or the survivalist hypothesis. I agree that ESP, if it exists, is a very erratic power, but on the other hand we haven’t got firm evidence that the human mind could survive without the human brain. So I think it’s wise to remain open-minded on the issue.” She poured herself a cup of coffee, pleased with her self-control. It was only when she returned to her office that she saw there was a brown splash on the front of her white wool sweater.

At three o’clock the next afternoon, Alison found herself in the lab with Gudrun, the medium and her companion. Alison was not entirely happy with the experimental set-up; it had been designed to test ordinary university students for ESP, not professional mediums, and she suspected researchers in other parapsychology laboratories would not think the barriers against potential fraud sufficient. But if we find anything interesting, she told herself, we can redesign the experiment to make the controls much more rigorous.

Melanie Eglinton introduced her large companion as Mrs Snelling. “I’m afraid your friend will have to wait outside the lab while we run the tests,” Gudrun said.

Mrs Snelling stiffened. “But it isn’t safe for my dar-

ling to enter a trance without having someone experienced at her side."

Alison scented collusion, but to her surprise, Melanie Eglinton said, "Oh, don't worry, Nana. I'm sure I'll be fine."

"Yes, Mrs Snelling, you can sit with the other observers behind the one-way window," Gudrun said. Yes, Alison thought, sit where I can keep an eye on you.

The set-up was one of the standard ganzfeld procedures. Melanie lay on a comfortable padded bench in one small room, halved ping-pong balls taped over her eyes and earphones playing white noise clamped over her ears. "The point is to de-emphasize regular sensory input," Gudrun had explained, "so that you can be more aware of any possible psi input." In the room next to Melanie was a young male student, a small stack of photographs in front of him. He was to concentrate on each of the photos for several minutes; Melanie was to relax and let images rise spontaneously into her conscious mind. Once the young man had finished going through the pictures, she would be roused and shown sets of four photographs; in each set, one photo would be among those the young man had been looking at earlier. Video cameras pointed down at both of them, and Gudrun sat behind the one-way mirror, a laptop in front of her, ready to record anything interesting. The others sat with her. Alison knew the first half of the experiment would be dull to watch, but she was determined to see the whole of it from beginning to end. In the past she had avoided testing people who claimed to have psychic powers because research suggested they were no more likely than the general population to score higher than chance. "Run starting now," Gudrun said over her microphone.

"Okay, I'm ready," Melanie said.

The student picked up the first photo. It showed a horse trotting across a green field. The medium frowned in concentration. "Oh no, she's supposed to relax," Gudrun said, typing something into her laptop. Mrs Snelling sighed. Now's my opportunity to find out more about Melanie, Alison thought. "So Miss Eglinton has never been tested in this way before?" she asked.

Mrs Snelling shook her head. "She's had two or three offers in her travels, but she's always turned them down before."

Now the young man was gazing at a yacht sailing on a bright blue sea. "I'm afraid this is going to be rather tedious for you," Alison said. "There's nothing much to see until the end when we ask the subject if she can select the right pictures."

Mrs Snelling patted her black patent-leather handbag. "Despite what people think, being a medium is often a rather dull job. Sometimes the spirits just aren't willing to come or when they do, they can sometimes seemed obsessed with trivial matters."

"Have you been with Miss Eglinton long?" Alison asked.

Mrs Snelling smiled. Her teeth were so brilliantly white they looked artificial. "I've known her since she was a girl. She's the daughter of Caroline Eglinton, who was a very well-known medium in Yorkshire before she passed on ten years ago. Perhaps you've heard of her?"

"I'm afraid not," Alison said, feeling a sudden surge of sympathy for Melanie. To have lost her mother in her

middle teens must have been a terrible experience. "So she inherited her mother's talents, you think?"

"Oh yes. When Melanie was eleven or twelve, there was a sudden onset of poltergeist activity around her. By the time it stopped, she had the ability to contact spirits. But she's told me that even before then, as a very tiny girl, she used to hear voices."

Through the glass, they could see that the medium's face had finally relaxed; indeed, Melanie seemed to be asleep. Hm, Alison thought, if all the adults around you are obsessed with talking to spirits, discovering that you could do it as well would be a sure way to win approval. "How long has she been making public appearances?"

Mrs Snelling patted her handbag again. "About ten years now, since she was 15. Poor Caroline had become seriously ill with cancer at that point, and Melanie had to step into her shoes – they needed the money, since Caroline's husband had disappeared years ago and her family had broken off all ties with her because they didn't approve of her becoming a medium."

The student was concentrating on a picture of a snow-capped mountain peak; it was the last of the photos he had been given, and in a minute, Melanie would be tested to see if she could pick out any of the photographs. Alison's experience told her that Melanie, if she deviated at all from chance, would do so only slightly. The girl had certainly done impressive work in her show, Alison thought, but is that because she learned early how to deceive audiences, first to get attention and then as a matter of economic necessity? "So you do a lot of travelling together?"

"Oh yes. I've been with Melanie since she got started. I've never had the power myself, but I was her mother's best friend, and she was so young when she began that she was happy for me to manage things on the business end. She's still not very practical, poor dear, so she needs me along."

Or perhaps Melanie values you as a substitute mother, Alison thought, and furthermore, a mother who seems under her thumb. "I suppose her schooling was disrupted?"

"Oh yes, the poor dear had to leave as soon as she was 16. I rather wish she'd got some qualifications but she told me school was boring, and I know she didn't have many friends. She's very clever, though, and she reads a lot of books."

Alison was not able to find out the sort of books Melanie preferred to read because a student assistant had entered the medium's room and was helping her to remove the ping-pong balls and earphones. As soon as that was done, the student laid out the first set of four photos: the horse, a London street scene, an airplane and two elderly women drinking tea. Melanie pursed her lips and ran her hand over the pictures as if she expected one to feel different from the others. Finally her forefinger came down – on the airplane.

"Poor dear," Mrs Snelling said again, squeezing her handbag. Alison sat tensely, but Melanie did no better on the second photo; she picked a picture of a rose instead of the boat. When the experiment had finished, Melanie Eglinton had scored an average of 2 out of 10, the same as chance. She looked a little sulky, but perhaps that was due more to boredom than disappoint-

ment. When they were all together again in the observation room, she said "Don't worry, Nana" to Mrs Snelling, who was fluttering about, apparently more upset than she was. "It just proves that my gift is for contacting the minds of the dead, not of the living."

Gudrun was studying the screen of her laptop. She looked up. "One test is hardly enough to be able to be sure of that. Wouldn't you like to –"

Melanie shook her head emphatically. "No, it was interesting to try it once, but that's not the reason I have my talent. The spirits don't care about that sort of thing, though they did tell me one thing while I was lying there, Dr Leonard," she said, putting on her coat as Mrs Snelling tucked the taxi fare they'd just given her into her purse. "It's a curious message, but the spirits insisted that I should pass it on to you. They said 'Sally Mouse wants to go fishing for cheese.'"

The shock hit Alison full in the chest and for a moment she could not breathe. The others were looking at her, Gudrun as well as Mrs Snelling. She thought she saw pity on Melanie's face, but then her vision clouded as her eyes turned watery. "I don't know what you're talking about," she said, but her voice sounded unsteady.

After the medium and her companion had left, and while the other student assistants were in the booths switching off the cameras and removing their tapes, Gudrun came up to Alison and said, "She did it again, didn't she?"

Alison swallowed, but found herself unwilling to risk speaking, so she nodded.

"I'm sorry." Gudrun put her arm around Alison's shoulders. She smelt of tobacco and perfume. "I shouldn't have invited her to the lab. She's clearly no telepath, but she's found out about your daughter somehow, and she's harassing you."

Alison stepped away from Gudrun's arm. Melanie's expression had been kind and somewhat puzzled, she thought, not triumphant or hostile in any way. "I'll see you tomorrow," she said. Then she rushed back down the corridor, ignoring greetings, ducked into her office, locked the door and turned off the light. She sat hunched at her desk, fists pressed against her eyes. Her eyes felt sore and swollen but she didn't cry. After what seemed a long time had passed, she got to her feet again and reached for her coat and briefcase. But when she heard passing footsteps in the corridor, she went over to the window and looked out. It was almost dark; the sky was heavy and grey and the snow on the ground below a dull white. It had melted in places, exposing patches of withered brown grass.

Alison turned away and looked at her office; the dim light was enough to reveal the shelves and shelves of books, several of them written or edited by her, the volumes of the journal she was co-editor of, the stack of post on the corner of her desk: letters asking her to read papers, former students asking for references, memoranda from the department, even an invitation to appear on a local television chat programme. All the paraphernalia of a moderately successful scholarly career was there. Normally the sight of her office was enough to soothe Alison's mind – so much to do, but each task precise and clear, like an experiment. The

field of parapsychology was, of course, complex and frequently baffling, certainly controversial, but Alison knew it was the right field for her, even though she had only been in it for six years. She had already had far more success than she had ever had with reaction times and short-term memory, her former and more academically respectable field of work. Granted, most of that success consisted of finding flaws in the construction of other researchers' ESP experiments, but now she was looking for positive evidence herself, evidence strong enough to change the minds of sceptics. The irony was that she was not sure herself of the existence of the paranormal. There was undoubtedly some impressive anecdotal evidence, but if these powers were real why did they tend to vanish when you tried to pin them down in a laboratory? She moved to her desk and picked up the paperweight a former student had given her, a sleeping cat carved from some smooth heavy stone. And it was such an important field. So many people, especially among her colleagues, dismissed it out of hand, while millions of others believed whatever they read in the tabloids. Rational investigation was extremely important. There was the possibility of scientifically proving that there was more to human existence than matter alone. Hard proof, she thought, cradling the stone cat in her hand. Perhaps I'm close to finding it. But why does it have to be so close to my heart? Why can't it be clean and clinical, easily reducible to numbers and capable of being plotted on a graph? With a sudden surge of rage, she hurled the paperweight to the floor of her office. But the floor was carpeted, and the cat did not break, except to lose one ear. Alison knelt down, feeling under her desk for the tiny fragment of stone. Tears were blurring her vision. I'll have to bring some glue and put it back on, she thought.

After her self-control returned, she went home. It was now utterly dark and so quiet that she could hear the snow squeak faintly under her boots as she climbed the steps to the front door of her Edwardian terraced house. For a moment she hung back, repelled by the darkness of the windows and the thought of the emptiness within. Coward, she said to herself, and pushed the key into the lock. She prepared a quick meal of pasta and a salad, poured herself a glass of wine and watched the television news as she ate. It was good to hear other human voices, but afterwards she could scarcely remember any of the headlines. There was a bit of washing-up to do, and then – thank God – a pile of essays to mark. But as she sat in her rocking chair, Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* playing in the background, she found she could not concentrate. Little sounds, such as the humming of the fridge coming on, made her start. The reflected headlights of passing cars running over the ceiling distracted her. Eventually, she knew she could not put it off any longer. She got to her feet, brushed down her skirt, marched into the bedroom and opened one of the doors of the wardrobe. It was there on the top shelf, a plain brown cardboard box, containing all that she had kept of Faye's things; everything else Alison had tried to be sensible about and had given away. But what was left was the most personal and important. How shocking to think a human life, even one as short as ten years, could be reduced to one cardboard box here and a wooden box

in a cemetery. Normally, Alison only allowed herself to look at the box twice a year, on Faye's birthday and at Christmas, as a present to herself. As soon as she had taken off the top, her vision began to blur again and she rubbed angrily at her eyes. She took out a much-worn stuffed rabbit and then a pair of baby shoes with a broken strap. Normally she would have handled these objects for several minutes, running her fingers over them and letting the memories associated with them flood back. But it wasn't her daughter's birthday and it wasn't Christmas. "This is *research*," Alison said aloud to the room.

She found what she wanted at the bottom of the box: several stacks of folded papers, stapled together to make short booklets. The covers were illustrated with hand-drawn titles and pictures. The one on top said *Mrs Sally Mouse goes to The Circus words and drawings by Faye Leonard*. It was a series of books Faye had made the year before she died. Alison knew the stories were derivative, closely based on her daughter's favourite books, but she kept them in the bottom of the box because they were the most precious souvenirs of all, hints of what her daughter might have become. Alison forced herself to put the top one aside. Underneath was the one she was looking for: *Sally Mouse in a Boat*. She opened it and there was a crude but charming drawing of a mouse in a dinghy, dangling a line over the side of the boat. A seagull in a sailor's cap, flying overhead, was saying, "Silly mouse, you can't eat Fish." But Sally Mouse was replying, "Stupid bird, I'm fishing for CHEESE!!!"

Alison slapped the papers shut and stared up sightlessly at the ceiling. How could Melanie Eglinton have possibly known about this? Then, with fumbling fingers, she rapidly but carefully replaced all the items in the box. She pressed the lid down and put it back up on the shelf. Then she was pacing through her living room. No one could have broken into my house without my noticing, surely. And Faye didn't do those books for school – she did them at home, for fun, and I have the only copies. Not even Luke has any. Her grandparents saw them but they're dead now too. She stopped pacing and stared at the telephone. Then she went over to her purse, opened it, and pulled out a crumpled bit of paper, where she had jotted down the name of the hotel where Melanie Eglinton was staying, taking it from Gudrun's lab report when her student's back was turned.

She looked at the telephone again and swallowed. I've got to find the answer to this, she thought. I won't be able to think about anything else until I do. It could be that Melanie really can – Alison reached for the telephone and began pressing buttons.

At three o'clock the next afternoon, Alison was standing in front of the door of a hotel room. Don't forget, she told herself, there may still be some perfectly conventional explanation for Melanie's knowledge. But anticipation was making her breathless. Alison rapped the door firmly, twice.

It was opened a moment later by Mrs Snelling. She was wearing a pink-and-white flowered trouser suit which made her look stouter than ever. "Do come in, my dear. I'm so glad you're going to have the opportunity to see my Melanie do what she's really good at." As the

woman pressed her large hands together, Alison thought that if the girl were a fraud then this woman would have to know it, and yet she seems so naively sincere.

As Alison looked around the hotel room, she was surprised to see how slight the signs of the presence of the medium and her companion were – the beds were made, any clothes they were travelling with were neatly put away, and the only personal items in view were some paperback books on one of the night tables and the small round table in the centre of the room. It was draped with a floor-length heavy black cloth and surrounded by four chairs. At the centre of the table was a small crystal sphere about the size of a grapefruit. She was slightly disappointed to see these stereotypical accessories of mediumship. Melanie, who had been stretched out on one of the twin beds reading a book, came up to greet her. Alison caught a glimpse of the title as Melanie put it away: *Unleash 100% of Your Inner Potential!* If that's the kind of book she likes to read, Alison thought, then she's as naïve as she looks.

"Of course I don't gaze into this crystal ball and read your fortune," Melanie said. "It's just that when I look into the crystal, it helps set off the right vibrations for contacting the spirits." She brushed her fingers lightly over the top of the sphere. "It was my mother's."

It's probably useful for self-hypnosis, Alison thought. There were various theories about why mediums went into trances in order to contact the spirits of the dead. Taking an approach similar to ganzfeld experiments, most theories assumed that the subconscious mind of the medium would be more open to outside influence than her everyday consciousness was, whether it came from the dead or from the sitters with her. And if you thought that mediumship was simply a fraud, then feigning a trance would be a good way of dramatizing the séance so that the sitters would find it easier to believe the medium really was contacting their dear departed. But now Melanie was looking directly at Alison. "So you think my power might be real after all?"

Alison handed her coat to the waiting Mrs Snelling; at the same time, she pulled a miniature tape recorder from the pocket of her suit jacket. "I hope you don't mind if I record this." Melanie shook her head and Alison continued, "I've come because it's a good principle for a scientist to investigate phenomena that seem exceptional." She was determined to do all she could to keep the session on an impersonal and objective basis for as long as possible.

Melanie seated herself at the round table. "Nana, could you dim the lights?"

"I thought that modern mediums didn't go in for dark rooms," Alison said, but her feeble attempt at humour fell flat. Blushing, she sat down at the table and Mrs Snelling sat beside her. Alison was disturbed to realize her hands were trembling slightly. Just keep your mind focused on the business at hand, she told herself. The room was dim now, but she could still make out Melanie's features.

"I do public shows in full light, as you know," Melanie said, "but I find that people who come to me privately for help find it more relaxing to have the lights turned down." She closed her eyes. "I know a lot of people don't like to sing in public, but if you could just sing along

with me or even just hum the tune, the vibrations will open this place to spiritual influence.” And without further ado, she launched into an old hymn Alison dimly remembered from school assemblies:

*There is a happy land
Far, far away.
Where Saints in glory stand
Bright, bright as day.*

Mrs Snelling immediately began to sing along. After a moment or two of hesitation, Alison joined in. Alison at first wondered if the music was merely a theatrical gesture, but she had to admit to herself that it worked – Melanie had a good sense of pitch and rhythm, and after what seemed like five minutes of singing Alison found herself much more relaxed, even though her hands were still cold and sweaty.

Then Melanie fell silent and they all had to wait for what seemed another five minutes, while the girl frowned in concentration. Alison mentally recited to herself the questions she had prepared in order to test whether or not the medium was really in contact with Faye. Suddenly Melanie spoke. “I see water.” Alison shivered. “Is it the sea? I can smell salt.” Alison shivered again, though the room was overheated. “There’s no sand, no beach,” Melanie said. “There are only rocks, great big black boulders, running far out into the water, with the waves crashing against them.”

There was a cold prickling along Alison’s spine, but on the whole she was surprised how calm she was. Yes, she said to herself, we were on the Cornish coast.

“I see people among the rocks,” Melanie said. “The shapes are vague, and it’s difficult to make them out, but I think it’s a man, a woman and a child. They’re sitting on the rocks and I think they’ve been having a picnic. I think this scene is close to you, Dr Leonard.”

Alison made no reply. She was torn between the thought that the girl seated across from her was really seeing into the past with another’s eyes and the possibility that there might be some sort of clever deceit going on. But even if Melanie had learnt the circumstances of Faye’s death from someone, how could she have known about Sally Mouse?

“Now I see the child alone. She’s climbing over the rocks, she’s left the adults behind somewhere. She’s a girl, about ten, with light brown hair. She’s out towards the end of the chain of rocks now – she’s very far out from the shore, and the water must be deep here. The waves are big and powerful, they’re hitting the rocks and splashing water on them, making them slippery. The girl’s climbing to the top of the very last boulder – oh! her foot’s slipped, she’s tumbling down –”

“That’s enough!” Alison broke in. Her face was wet, and she wished the light was even dimmer. “Can’t you do anything more than just see the girl? Can you talk to her?” She knew she would not be able to bear it if Melanie went on to describe what happened next, how she had gone off to look for her daughter, running, clambering over the rocks, shouting herself hoarse, then reaching that rock at the very end, looking down and seeing deep into the clear, cold water, seeing Faye down there, her hair streaming out like a mermaid’s, far, far below the surface. Without stopping to think, Alison had leapt into the water and dived down. The water

was icy, and it seemed to resist her passage, but it must have been only seconds before she reached Faye, put her arms around the child and began kicking up towards the surface. Their heads broke water together, but the child’s lolled back and Alison saw a purple bruise on her forehead, and as she pressed Faye to herself she realized the girl wasn’t breathing – that was the worst moment. But she had found it surprisingly easy to clamber back on to a boulder with a flat top, then from some corner of her mind had come all the steps for artificial respiration – she turned Faye over, pounded her back and water came spurting out of the girl’s mouth and nose, she rolled her daughter on her back again, put her fingers in the girl’s mouth, searching for any obstruction, making sure her tongue was out of the way and then she breathed into her daughter’s lungs, pressed the girl’s chest down, breathed again – when she noticed Luke was standing there, just above her, she could still remember how both the terrified expression on his face and the fact it had taken him so long to reach the end of the rocks made her furiously angry. “Get an ambulance!” she had screamed. “Call one before it’s too late!”

“Mama,” Melanie was saying, “Mama, are you there?” Her voice had become light and high, childlike certainly, but Alison couldn’t recognize it as Faye’s. She was suddenly seized with a terrible regret: had she forgotten what her daughter’s voice sounded like? But when Alison opened her mouth, she found her own voice hardly worked. “Are – are you there, Faye?” was all she could manage. Her eyes were squeezed shut; she knew she could not bear to look at the medium.

“Mama, it’s really, really nice here,” the child’s voice said. “Don’t worry about me, ’cause I’m happy here.”

Alison’s heart was beating so strongly she feared it would leap out of her chest. She floundered desperately in her mind, trying to remember the questions she had so carefully prepared. “Do – do you remember your rabbit, Faye?”

“Do you remember my train set, Mama? Daddy gave it to me. I came down one Christmas morning, and there it was, making a silver circle around the Christmas tree.”

For a moment, Alison was paralysed with fear and awe. So it was true then! Somehow, somewhere, her daughter was still alive. She swallowed, though her mouth was dry. She had not thought of what to say to her daughter. “I should have come sooner,” she whispered. “I might have saved you.”

“I’m so happy now, Mama,” the childlike voice said. Then Melanie’s voice deepened to her usual register. “She’s fading now, she’s going away. I’m sorry, she’s so light, I can’t hold her, she just flies through my fingers.”

For an instant, Alison thought of the solid weight of her daughter’s body in her arms – even dead, she had had mass. “Did you call to me when you were dying, Faye?” she asked. “Have you tried to contact me since then?” There was nothing you could do, the doctor had said to Alison some hours later, after the ambulance men and the hospital had both tried and failed to revive her child. Your daughter fell and hit her head on a rock and drowned immediately. You could have been standing right beside her and not been able to prevent it.

“I’m sorry,” Melanie said. “She’s already gone.” Some-

one was pressing a tissue into Alison's hand, and she rubbed her eyes with it. "Did you hear your daughter shout as she fell?" Melanie asked.

Alison finally opened her eyes again. She looked at Melanie. "No – surely you of all people ought to understand what I'm talking about. When Faye had been out of sight for, well, it wasn't very long, about four or five minutes, I suddenly felt a terrible cold fear in my heart. The doctor claimed that she didn't suffer, that she lost consciousness as soon as her head hit the rock, but I've always wondered if – if what I experienced was telepathy, though it could also have been a premonition of her death." Either way, she thought bitterly, it was useless for saving my child. Maybe that's why up to now I've been so reluctant to accept the evidence that psi powers may be real. "And the other thing is that several times over the past few years, I've had an odd sense of Faye's presence as if she were somehow in the same room as I was yet invisible – but I've always dismissed those feelings as wishful thinking."

Melanie shook her head. "No, now you see that it was your daughter wanting to communicate with you. But I didn't sense any memory of pain from the child spirit, so I'm sure she didn't suffer when she died. I think those experiences show that you might have some power yourself."

Alison was suddenly acutely self-conscious. She had never told anyone the reason why she had changed her field of research to parapsychology, especially not any of her students. But she could still remember, with painful vividness, sitting there with Luke, him still sullen because she had been promoted and he had not, her disgusted with his envy, neither of them talking to each other – no wonder Faye had gone off on her own; the family summer holiday had been spoiled by Luke's jealousy, and even though they were careful not to quarrel in front of their daughter, she must have sensed their unhappiness; any child would have. But they both knew that Faye was a sensible girl, mature for her ten years, and so neither of them had much worried when Faye wandered out of sight for a few minutes. That was why it had been so shocking for Alison's mood of controlled distaste with Luke to have been ruptured by a terrible fear which drove her to her feet immediately. Never before in her life had she been so frightened for her daughter, not even when Faye had fallen out of a playground swing right in front of Alison – but her daughter had come out of that with only a bad cut on her arm. Ever since then Alison had wondered whether she had really had an instantaneous knowledge of her daughter's death or if that flash of uncharacteristic fear had been mere coincidence, perhaps an ordinary mother's apprehension distorted by a week of very unpleasant emotions. And she had been even more suspicious of those sensations of Faye's presence. But now, she thought, my daughter must have been trying to contact me. This Melanie Eglinton has proved to me that the human mind does somehow survive death. "I wouldn't say there was anything special about me. A great many people have had paranormal experiences."

She got to her feet. But even as she scribbled a cheque for the hovering Mrs Snelling, she knew she owed Melanie something more than just money. "To answer the question you asked at the beginning of the

session," she said, "yes, I believe your power is real."

Melanie smiled, like a child who had been given a treat. "It's so wonderful to be able to help people," she said.

It was not until Alison stepped out of the hotel and onto the street that she realized what the strange emotion she now felt was, the emotion she had not felt for so long that she had almost forgotten what it was – it was joy. The sky was grey, but the day had been warm enough to melt the snow, though it was now once again below freezing. A few muffled figures scurried past, but Alison did not bother to fasten her coat. She walked with her head high, suddenly feeling ten years younger. She was even tempted to break into song, but she confined herself to smiling at anonymous strangers. She scarcely noticed their faces, however; she did not care whether or not they smiled back. Melanie's talent is real, she thought, the human personality survives death, and, somewhere, Faye is alive. She's happy, and soon I'll be able to talk to her again – Alison stopped in mid-stride, almost stumbling. A young Asian woman, her sari swathed in a thick parka, paused and looked at Alison uncertainly as if she thought the other woman might need help, but Alison shook her head. I have to tell Luke, she thought, Luke has to know this.

But it was several hours before she telephoned him. She told herself that her emotions had to be on a reasonably even keel first, but she knew that was not the only thing. They could not look at each other without thinking of the past they shared and the loss they had in common. She did not tell him over the phone what had happened; she merely made an arrangement to see him the next morning. She drove down the few miles that separated her university town from the smaller town where he now lived and the college where he now taught. The sun was finally shining and the light seemed sudden and intensely bright; even the bare branches of the trees were beautiful against the blue sky. As she pulled into the drive of Luke's anonymous suburban bungalow, she wondered if he had changed much in the two years since she had last seen him. Until last night, she had not spoken to him since he had rung a few months ago to say that Janice had given birth to their second child, a healthy boy they were going to name Peter.

She had to step over a plastic tricycle to ring the doorbell. Luke answered a few moments later. She was surprised to see how grey his hair had become. He wore a loose sweatshirt, but she could see he had become overweight. "Sorry to keep you waiting, Alison," he said. "I was putting the baby down for his nap."

She followed him into the living room, past a Barbie doll whose legs had been bent backwards and a half-open colouring book with torn pages. My house was never like this, Alison thought, even when Faye was little. "Janice is at work, of course, and Suzy's at day care," Luke said as he sank down on the sofa behind the coffee table. "I've stayed at home to catch up on some work, just so long as Pete'll let me." He smiled ruefully.

Alison sat in an armchair, glad to hear that Janice was not there. She knew that Luke and Janice had not started dating until well after she and Luke were divorced, but Janice had been one of Luke's under-

graduates and she was so young – Alison couldn't bear looking at her, especially if she had a child in her arms. Even without Janice there, it was still painful to be in Luke's house; Alison couldn't help but remember the specialist who had said it was surprising she had been able to conceive even one child. She discreetly rubbed at a sticky spot on one of the arms, apparently strawberry jam, and said without thinking, "Some research?"

His face took on that familiar, slightly guilty grin. "Maybe." Alison was sure he had not published anything since the birth of his children. She suspected he had stopped writing after Faye died – that would be another instance of how they had reacted to her death in opposite ways. But in her new happy mood, she did not want to hurt his feelings. "Well, I'm sure your students find that you're an excellent teacher." Oh damn, how patronizing that sounds, she thought. In her embarrassment she looked away from Luke, at the wall over the television set. She was a little shocked to see a crucifix hanging there. But then she remembered Janice was a Roman Catholic. Such an ugly object to have around small children, she thought.

"Well, it's hard to work in my office because there's always someone who wants to talk to me," Luke said. No doubt he no more meant to offend her than she him, but it reminded her of how when they were married they had occasionally joked that he should send some of his students over to her office, because there were never more than two or three brave enough to speak to her. "I have a bit of a problem like that now," she said. "I mean since I started doing parapsychology. You'd be surprised how many students think they've seen a ghost." She attempted to chuckle, but the sound fell flat.

"Yeah," Luke said, staring down at the table. "Can I get you a coffee or something?"

"No, I'm all right." She leaned forward in the chair, but he would not look at her. "Actually, I came down because I wanted to talk about something important, something connected with my research."

He nodded, still slouched forward, his hair in familiar disordered tufts. She hoped he would remember to comb it before he went out for the day, but she doubted he would. Well, his personal appearance was no longer any business of hers. She suddenly scratched harder at the blot of jam, heedless of the sticky grime that was building up under her fingernails. "Luke, do you believe in survival?"

He frowned, running a hand through his hair and looking up at her. It left his hair in more disorder than before. "Do you mean whether the human race has a future?"

She swallowed. "No, I mean the way we use the term in parapsychology – the persistence of an individual personality after physical death."

He smiled warmly and suddenly he looked again like the man she had been married to. "Oh, sure. Yes, I believe it. I think that God will raise us all from the dead."

Alison was shocked. During the time they were married, he had been an atheist; she had been the more cautious agnostic, at least until Faye's death.

Luke gathered up a handful of Lego blocks that had been left on the coffee table and began fitting them together. His face had turned pink, but his eyes were

alight. "I know it must sound surprising coming from me, but after Janice and I got married, I started going to Mass with her. Only occasionally at first, but since the children were born it's become more important to both of us."

Alison recrossed her legs and pulled her skirt down tightly over her knee. Her throat was suddenly swollen and she was afraid she might begin to cry. "But how can you believe in God after what happened to Faye?" She was tempted to add something sarcastic about having received two children in the place of one, but stopped herself in time.

Luke looked down at the object in his hand: he had assembled a wall with a window in the middle of it. He flicked the window open with a blunt forefinger. "Well, I had stopped believing in God when I was twelve years old, but in fact it was Faye's death that changed things for me. We didn't talk much the last year of our marriage, certainly not about important things, but I'd already started to think that there must be a reason for the universe existing, that something so beautiful couldn't just come into being by chance."

"Beautiful! But what about –"

"Faye was – is beautiful. She was taken away from us, I know, but she's in safe hands now." He smiled down at the toy he had built.

Alison's hands were trembling with anger and she tried to still them. Of course he doesn't care any more about Faye, she thought, he's done everything possible to forget her. Well, then maybe he doesn't deserve to know what I know. But despite her anger, that thought still gave her a twinge of guilt. Ought she not to tell Luke, whatever his muddle-headedness, that there was some really hard evidence of Faye's survival? She closed her hands into fists and turned to him. She must try a new tack, a different approach. "Do you know anything about mediums, Luke?"

He shook his head and put the little wall on the table. "Not a lot. It may sound strange, given what I've just said about life after death, but I'm sure they can't really talk to the dead. I know it sounds practically medieval, but I think it's dangerous to have anything to do with them – for one thing they're harmful to your pocket-book. I can pray for Faye, and she can – and does, I'm sure – pray for me, and that's enough."

Not for the first time, Alison concluded that it was hopeless to try to change Luke's way of thinking. "So you dismiss them out of hand?"

"Well, I mean it's so pathetic really, the way they exploit grieving people. And the messages they pass from what is supposed to be the afterlife are so trivial, really, even when they're impressive in their knowledge – saying where Uncle Arthur left his false teeth, say – if the afterlife is like that I don't want to have any part of it." There was a sudden squall from the back of the house. Luke rose. "Uh oh, Pete's awake. Do you want to come and see him?"

Alison got to her feet and brushed down her skirt. "Just for a minute." She followed Luke into the baby's room, glad his attention had shifted to his tiny son. He lifted the child up and put him against his shoulder. "Look at Alison, Pete." The baby's dark blue eyes stared at her impassively out of a round pink face. Had Faye looked like that at the same age? Alison was sure she

had been much prettier. "He looks just like you," she said.

"Thanks." Luke blushed.

That wasn't necessarily a compliment, Alison thought. "I'm afraid I have to be getting on."

Luke followed her to the door, the baby still on his shoulder, now mercifully quiet. "Oh, by the way, I met a new graduate student from your department the other day. She seemed very impressive."

"Really? What was her name?"

"Yeah, now what was it? Sylvia, something, I think." He patted the baby's back gently. "She's not exactly in your field, however. She's doing a study of parental grief."

"I don't think we have any Sylvias." Alison frowned, digging in her purse for her car keys. She should have put them in her coat pocket as she normally did, but being in Luke's presence had, as usual, disconcerted her.

"We had a long talk in my office about my reaction to Faye's death. She's really very skilful at that sort of thing, very sympathetic. So I was wondering if she hadn't talked to you as well. She's about 25, with pale blonde hair."

Alison frowned, even as her hand closed on her car keys. "That sounds like Gudrun, but she's working with me on parapsychology, not training to be a counsellor."

"Whoever she is, she's going to go far. She even got me talking about Faye's toys."

Alison's whole body suddenly felt freezing cold. She took a deep breath and struggled to keep her voice steady. "Did you mention the train set you gave her?"

"Yes, I did. I'll never forget how excited Faye was when she saw it running around the Christmas tree."

You always liked it more than she did, Alison thought. "And Sally Mouse?"

"Oh yeah, that too. I wanted to explain what Faye was like as a person, how creative she was. I loved those little books of hers." He smiled and Alison was startled to see his eyes were wet. "Hey, it's good that we can talk about things like this again." He frowned slightly. "But Alison, you look a little pale. Are you all right?"

She nodded mechanically. "Just fine, Luke. But I've got to be going, there's someone I have to speak to urgently."

As she backed the car out of the drive, Luke stepped out on the porch, his eyes squinting in the sunlight, waving his baby son's hand. Alison waved back, but as soon as she had managed to get a mile down the road, she pulled into a lay-by and put her arms across the steering wheel, pillowing her head on them so that no one would see her weeping.

The next day Alison went to Melanie Eglinton's hotel room again, this time accompanied by Gudrun. She did not tell her student what had happened in the previous meeting with the medium, but she said, "There's something you ought to see about the way she works." Alison had not wished to be outnumbered, and though she did not consciously admit it to herself, she also felt she could rely on Gudrun to keep the matter private and confidential. Gudrun's face was tense; Alison hoped that the medium would interpret any strain in her own face

as the result of the stirring up of painful memories and not anger. She knocked on the door once, firmly.

As before, Mrs Snelling was quick to answer it. She was briefly surprised to see Gudrun, but was soothed when Alison explained, "I wanted my student to see what a private sitting with a gifted medium is like." Melanie, who had been lying on one of the twin beds looking through a notebook, quickly got up. Alison caught a glimpse of neat rounded handwriting inside the notebook as Melanie put it away, but the plain blue cover revealed nothing of its contents. "Dr Leonard, I'm very honoured that you've come to see me again," she said.

Just looking at the girl's innocent demeanour was enough to make Alison's temper flare up. She was sure she could guess correctly what was in Melanie's notebook. "Yes, I'm sorry that I didn't make an appointment but I just couldn't wait."

Melanie smiled and moved to the little round table covered with the dark cloth. "It doesn't matter," she said, seating herself by the crystal sphere. "There aren't any clocks in the afterlife, you know. If the spirits are willing, they'll speak to me."

The other women seated themselves at the table, Gudrun on Alison's right and Mrs Snelling on her left. "Do you hear the spirits talk in your head and then repeat it," the Icelandic girl asked, "or do your spirits take control of your body and use your mouth to speak for themselves?"

Melanie rested her fingertips lightly on her sphere. Alison noticed that even though the room was dim, the crystal caught what light there was and concentrated it to a single glowing point. I wonder how long it took her to arrange the room to get that effect, she thought. "I'm not really sure," Melanie said, gesturing for the group around the table to join hands. "When I come out of my trance, I often can't remember what I've said."

Alison had to bite her tongue to stop herself from pointing out how convenient that was. "I hope you can summon that spirit you contacted yesterday," she said.

"I'm afraid I have to warn you that the spirits are not predictable," Melanie said, "and I can't command them to come. But perhaps there is one who is waiting to speak to you." She closed her eyes and began to sing the same hymn as the day before. The other women joined in, Mrs Snelling happily, Gudrun hesitantly once she caught the words, and Alison eagerly. She was glad she had been able to manoeuvre her student between the medium and herself; she would not have wanted Melanie Eglinton to be able to sense her mood by holding hands with her.

The singing went on for several minutes, but unlike last time it did not serve to relax Alison. She became so impatient that she started to tap her foot in the air. But finally Melanie fell silent and her face relaxed as if she were asleep. She took several deep slow breaths and said, "Oh, I can see a beautiful garden – not clearly yet, but the grass is very green and there are such lovely flowers." She paused, breathing deeply again. "There's a row of tall flowers, and I can't see what's on the other side, but somehow I know that someone's there."

In the dim light, Gudrun glanced at Alison, clearly wondering how to react to this. Alison avoided meeting her student's eyes. When the silence had grown long,

Alison asked, "What kind of flowers are they?"

"Oh, beautiful ones. Red ones, pink ones, white ones. Just lovely," Melanie murmured, sounding like someone talking in her sleep. "Now there's an opening in the row and I can see the spirit person on the other side. She's such a pretty little girl, with light brown hair in two braids."

Alison's heart began to beat faster. She said, "Can you get her to talk to you? I have some questions I want to ask."

Melanie sighed dreamily. "Oh yes, now I can hear her voice. It's so soft, so light." The medium's own voice rose in pitch as she spoke. "Mama, Mama, are you there?"

Alison tried to keep her hands steady; she did not want Mrs Snelling to become suspicious and signal Melanie. "Yes, I am," she said, surprised at how easy it was to speak coolly, now that she knew it was all a fraud, then suddenly afraid she was speaking too coolly. "Darling," she said, trying to put more urgency in her tone, "are you happy there?" She felt it was the kind of stupid question a true believer would ask.

"Oh yes, Mama. I'm so happy."

"What do you do? Do you go to school?"

Alison was not surprised when the medium hesitated. "Oh Mama, I play all day with wonderful toys, just like the ones you gave me."

You mean just like the ones Luke told you about, Alison thought. And I'm sure you've got a wig hidden somewhere in this room, a long blonde one. "But you liked going to school when you were – here. You were such a good student."

Melanie's brow wrinkled. When she spoke her voice had its normal timbre. "Oh, I'm afraid the spirit is fading. She's becoming very vague and I can almost see through her."

"Ask her about her toys," Alison said urgently, suddenly afraid she might not be able to trap the medium.

"I can see something in her hands." Melanie's frown eased. "It's small and soft, it's got long ears – it's a little bunny. I'm getting a name too. Freddy. Yes, that's the bunny's name."

Alison swallowed drily. Now was the time to put her plan into action. "Can you see whether she's holding anything else? Does she have anything like a – like a toy dinosaur in her hands?"

Melanie's brow remained smooth. "Yes, yes, there is another toy. It's some kind of animal and it's strange-looking, so I can't quite make out what it is. It looks prehistoric somehow."

Look how she suddenly becomes vague when she hasn't got specific information to work on, Alison thought. "Can you get the spirit to tell you its name?" she asked.

"She's very fond of this toy," Melanie said. "She's cuddling it in her arms. I'm getting some sense of a name – could it begin with D perhaps? Something like Dina – or a B, maybe Barney?" The medium paused, apparently hoping that Alison would supply her with further hints.

Alison glanced at Gudrun. Her student's eyes were wide with surprise at this inept fishing for information.

"But what the spirit really wants to tell you is that she's happy," Melanie said, continuing as if she had forgotten Alison's question. "She plays in the beautiful garden all day long." Faye got bored if she wasn't learning

new things, Alison thought. "She especially likes her train set. She's put it around one of the flower bushes."

"But what's the name of the toy dinosaur?" Alison insisted.

Melanie frowned again. "There's been a sudden change. We aren't in the garden any more. It's the place where the big rocks are, the ones that jut out into the water. The girl's there, she's scrambling over them, and in the distance I can see a woman and a man. The woman has light brown hair, and she looks unhappy. Oh dear, the little girl's gone now, I can't see her any longer, and the woman is putting her hands to her head as if she was in pain –"

Alison wrenched her hands from Mrs Snelling and Gudrun and slapped them down on the surface of the table. The crystal sphere wobbled and Melanie opened her eyes. "My daughter never had a stuffed dinosaur toy!" Alison said.

Mrs Snelling tried to put a soothing hand on Alison's shoulder. Alison pulled away from her, getting to her feet. "And Faye never really cared that much for that train set – it was really more her father's toy than hers."

Melanie, who had been looking very alert, suddenly rubbed her eyes, as if she had just remembered she had been in a trance. "Well, perhaps that's why she likes it now, because playing with it reminds her of her father."

"So why did you see the non-existent dinosaur toy?"

Mrs Snelling did manage to get her hand on Alison's shoulder and tried to push her gently down back into her chair, but Alison resisted. "I couldn't really see clearly what it was, you know." Melanie did not look the least bit guilty or ashamed at being caught out. "Why should you want to try to trap me like that?"

Alison struck the table again, almost dislodging the sphere from its support. "No, you were the one who was trying to trap me! Why else would you go and see my ex-husband, claiming to be a psychology student researching parental grief?"

Gudrun gasped, and Mrs Snelling shook her head sorrowfully. But Melanie got to her feet, all alert now, walked over to the window and opened the curtains. As light flooded into the room, she turned round to face Alison. "So maybe I did talk to him. But the more I know about what a person was like before they died, the easier it is to contact their spirit."

"Absolutely right, darling," Mrs Snelling said, nodding her head.

"You mean the easier it is to mislead their friends or relatives into thinking you're in touch with the dead when all you really do is regurgitate information you've picked up behind their backs."

Melanie was shaking her head. "No, no, you just don't understand what it's like. I don't think anyone can who doesn't have the ability herself. The details I sometimes get from people who knew the spirit when it was alive are just a springboard – when I'm actually doing the sitting I get more information, things that I wasn't told about, that only the spirits could tell me."

Alison stared at Melanie's face. The girl's large blue eyes met hers unwaveringly. Does she really believe that, Alison wondered, or is she just saying it to protect herself? "All right, so what information have you told me that wasn't something you picked up from Luke?"

Melanie raised her chin. "Very important facts, like that your daughter is happy and she doesn't hold any anger against you."

"Vague generalities that any grieving person would want to hear."

"You just don't want to believe, that's all it is." Melanie busied herself with tying the curtains back with their satin cords.

Alison stepped back from the table, folding her arms across her chest. The girl's irrationality, whether genuine or feigned, was exasperating. "I bet you can't give me one piece of specific information about Faye that you didn't get from Luke."

Melanie pursed her lips. "I know that she likes playing with that train set more than you thought she did."

"No, I mean information about something that happened before she died."

The young medium stepped away from the window and towards Alison, holding out her hands. "Dr Leonard, sitters often tell me it isn't until the fourth or fifth session that I'm able to pass on really vital information to them. We've only had two sessions, one and a half really, and I'd just begun to establish firm contact with your daughter's spirit when you misled me. It's like what your student said about the pictures in your lab – to be really certain that someone doesn't have the power, you have to repeat the experiment many times." Melanie's eyes were pleading.

Alison realized she was trembling and tried to keep her body under control. "But you said you saw a dinosaur toy that never existed."

"Well, yes, I'm afraid I do make mistakes sometimes," Melanie said. "When I'm in a trance, I'm highly suggestible – I have to be in order to be open to the spirits, but that also means that sitters can influence me too."

This young woman, Alison thought, is a lot more intelligent than I first thought. She hesitated, torn between the desire to be able to communicate with her daughter and the fear of being trapped in an endless circle of deception. "Well, you're right that it would be very difficult for me to prove that you haven't got any paranormal power."

Melanie brightened. "Then why not study me, Dr Leonard? You could keep in touch with Faye, and you'd probably become famous."

Alison saw that Gudrun was looking up at her. Her student clearly expected her to decide what they should do. But Alison was still hesitant; she had never liked having to make up her mind under pressure. Though perhaps, she thought, if she continued to work with Melanie, she wouldn't have to decide, at least not until she had more evidence.

"And you know the paranormal is real, Dr Leonard," Melanie continued, "because you've experienced it yourself."

Alison saw that Gudrun's mouth was opening in surprise, but she held up her hand. Had those experiences come from a source outside herself? But as she reflected on them, she was struck by how different they were from any of the purported spirit communications she had heard Melanie pass on. It was not simply that they had been without words, but also they had had an entirely different flavour: urgent rather than placid, sharp

instead of vague, and more frightening than comforting. "Perhaps I do," she said to Melanie. "But I'm surprised that you think you have any power at all when you go round behind people's backs collecting information."

Gudrun stood up. "I have studied many mediums, Miss Eglinton, and I have to say that while there are some who have come up with surprising information from time to time, I don't think they would have considered your methods were a sign of a genuine gift."

Mrs Snelling snorted, but Melanie looked undismayed. "Most mediums find their power can only work when people believe in them, and this information helps me to inspire sitters so that they can have faith in me. Every once in a while, a sitter will find out that I've been talking to someone they know, but I never deny that I've done it and they're usually not upset."

"Not after you've explained how your power works, dear," said Mrs Snelling.

Melanie nodded. "When my mother was still in this world, sometimes I wasn't sure that I really had the power. I'd get things wrong during séances, but Mama always told me occasional mistakes were inevitable because communication between the living and the departed is very difficult. She taught me that the spirits won't speak to a medium who doesn't have confidence in her own power and so it's all right to do some research to bolster that confidence so you can help people more effectively. Then a few days before she passed over, she gave me a sign." Melanie stretched out her hand, showing the gold ring with a small sapphire she was wearing. "Mama used to wear this ring when I was very small, when my father was still around – it was their engagement ring, but it disappeared when he did. One evening when I went to see her in hospital, I mentioned that I'd dreamt of this ring. The next day she said to me that one of the spirit voices had told her that I was to look under a rock in our garden, that I would find there a gift from the spirits. So I looked and I found Mama's missing ring." She smiled at the recollection. "So you see, after an experience like that, I know my power is real. I know that it was given to me to help people, so when your student here kept showing up and I found out who you were and how unhappy you must be, I knew the spirits wanted me to comfort you."

Alison's anger had drained away and she felt profoundly depressed. "You're a bright young woman, Melanie. Why don't you look for a job that doesn't involve deceiving people?"

Melanie drew herself upright. "I can't imagine any other job I could do that would bring as much happiness to as many people as what I do now. But how can you deny that paranormal powers are real when you've heard about my ring?"

"I wonder what your spirits think of mediums who cheat," Alison said. "And as for that ring, couldn't your mother have hidden it away after your father left and then put it under that stone for you to find it there?"

"But she was in hospital!" Melanie exclaimed. She looked on the verge of tears. "She was so ill she couldn't even get out of bed without help."

Mrs Snelling came up, put her arm around Melanie's shoulders and led her into the bathroom adjoining the bedroom. There was the sound of weeping, and Alison and Gudrun looked at each other, both of them embar-

rassed. Mrs Snelling emerged a few moments later, shaking her head, but all she said was, "I hope you aren't going to go to the newspapers and say my darling's a fraud."

Alison picked up her coat and briefcase. She gripped its leather handle so tightly her fingers ached. Even before this meeting, she had decided not to talk to the press. Public exposure of Melanie Eglinton would require Alison to make her daughter's death a constant focus of attention, and she was sure she could not bear that. Though she had thought that catching Melanie out would force the girl to admit she was a fraud, the most she had hoped for was that it would help to persuade Melanie to change her career. She went towards the door, Gudrun following her. "I'll send you a cheque for the sitting and that's the last you'll hear from me."

"I don't see why you bothered to come and see Melanie when you didn't want to believe anyway," Mrs Snelling added as a parting shot.

Alison had opened the door, but she turned back and said, "Mrs Snelling, you put that ring under the stone in Melanie's garden, didn't you?"

The other woman glanced at the door to the bathroom as if to check that it was firmly closed, then she nodded. "Melanie had to believe in her power," she said softly. "Her mother was just the same – I had to do little things for Caroline from time to time just to be sure that she kept up her faith in herself. I only hope you haven't done any permanent damage to Melanie's power."

"I rather doubt that," Alison said. Gudrun followed her silently down the corridor, but while they were waiting for the lift, she said, "That was awful, especially at the end. Don't you think we should tell other people how she works?"

As the doors slid open and they went in, Alison answered, "The girl was right that we hadn't proved she always cheats."

Gudrun's blue eyes widened. "Do you think she might really have some power?"

"Probably not," Alison said. "There are so many others like her, and so many people who want to believe."

As they stepped out of the lift, Gudrun put her hand gently on Alison's arm. "Are you sure you're all right, Dr Leonard? Do you want me to stay with you?"

"Oh no, I've got some work to do," Alison replied. But instead of returning to her office, she went to where her car was parked and threw her briefcase in the back seat. She did something she almost never did – she drove without any destination in mind, taking minor roads rather than the motorway because they required more concentration, but always working her way east.

After an hour or so of driving, she switched on her radio. A plummy voice was reciting, "For I reckon that the sufferings we now endure bear no comparison with the splendour, as yet unrevealed, which is in store for us." She glanced at the tuner in surprise – it was set to Radio 3. Where was the classical music she had expected? "The universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendour of the children of God." Then she remembered it was Wednesday; this must be Choral Evensong from some cathedral or other. "To see is no longer to

hope: why should a man endure and wait for what he already sees? But if we hope for something we do not yet see, then, in waiting for it, we show our endurance." Irritated at the reader's supercilious tone, Alison switched off the radio.

As the sun was setting, she reached the coast. She turned off the engine and got out of the car, walking about to ease her stiff legs. She went down to the beach and looked out over the waters of the Wash – they stretched out, seemingly for ever. She saw she was alone, the only person within sight, and she began walking on the sand, firm after a winter of storms. The sky above her was a clear blue, and the setting sun was a disc of gold fire on the western horizon. I hope I made the right decision, she thought; I hope I haven't thrown away my last chance of contact with Faye.

As she walked along, some sense suddenly told her that she was not alone. She swung her head around – there, only a few metres behind her, was a young woman. How had she suddenly got there? No, the figure was that of a child. Alison stared, her mouth dry. The person she saw was a young woman whose face had the purity and innocence of a child's and the maturity and character of an adult's. She had light brown hair falling around her face and down to her shoulders, and hazel eyes. It was definitely Faye. Alison forced herself to approach, though fear – or was it awe? – made her unsteady on her feet. Alison found herself unable to speak and held out her hand when she was close enough to touch the girl. Faye extended her hand, and Alison, heart beating fiercely, closed her hand over her daughter's – and found her fingers passed through the hand – no, it was not Faye's hand that was insubstantial but Alison's. She, the living one, was the wraith.

Then Faye swept back her hair from her forehead, revealing the bruise there, still as purple as it had been on the day she died. She opened her mouth and said calmly, "The splendour that shall be revealed, Mama." Alison felt the force of her daughter's love radiating out towards her, brighter and more intense than the sun. Under the weight of its glory, she fell to her knees on the sand. She saw how cold she had become, how narrow and self-enclosed; and she knew that the melting which had just begun would be a long and painful process. When Alison looked up, she was alone again on the beach. The sun had set, but in the clear turquoise sky out over the sea, a single star had appeared.

For Tim

Jennifer Swift is an American by background, who lives in Oxford, England. The above is her third story for *Interzone*: the previous pieces were "As We Forgive Our Debtors" (issue 72) and "Man, Born of Woman" (issue 97). She has also had a few stories in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* and elsewhere, and has recently completed a novel.

Ronald Wright's *A Scientific Romance* (Anchor, £9.99) is exactly what it says it is: a calculated continuation of the tradition of British futuristic fiction which was overwhelmed and obscured after World War II by the importation of American science fiction. It pays homage to two of its predecessors in titling its first two parts "The Wells Device" and "After London," and mentions two more *en passant*, albeit obliquely, when its hero wryly compares his means of transportation to those employed by the heroes of Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* and M. P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud*. Its closest parallel texts are, however, two that the author almost certainly did not read and of which he probably never even heard: Edward Shanks's *The People of the Ruins* and Cicely Hamilton's *Theodore Savage*. The similarity arises not from any direct influence but from a sometimes uncanny resonance of concern, method and tone – and this is what places Wright's book at the very heart of its fugitive genre.

The distinctive attributes of the British tradition were never entirely lost, of course, not only because some British sf writers remained insistent on tracing their lines of influence from H. G. Wells and Olaf Stapledon instead of, or as well as, *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding Science Fiction* but because certain typical elements of scientific romance resisted dissolution by the ideological acids of the American Dream. Scientific romance was always, first and foremost, an apocalyptic art-form whose principal spur was the fear of wars and natural disasters to come. It was the imaginative fiction of an empire in terminal decline, a world whose frontiers were collapsing inwards rather than expanding outwards. It was never devoid of hope, but once the Great War of 1914-18 had revealed to everyone that modern warfare had no real victors its basic emotional spectrum ranged from the plaintively elegiac via the bitterly sarcastic to the madly hysterical.

The People of the Ruins (1920) and *Theodore Savage* (1922) were among the first scientific romances to be produced in the aftermath of the Great War, when the conviction was strongest that another such conflict would mean the end of civilization and the belief was widespread that this was the direction in which our collective passions would inevitably lead us. The similar anxieties extrapolated by Wright do not relate to war *per se* but to the possible ecocatastrophic effects of new diseases; the HIV epidemic is the event which seems to him to be the decisive omen of our impending doom. His hero, who fears that he has been afflicted by Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, takes delivery of an empty time machine built by a contemporary of Wells, which seems to have returned from the year 2500. He sets off for the

same year and finds London empty of all human life, reclaimed by tropical jungle. Like Mary Shelley's Verney and Shiel's Adam Jeffson he sets off on an odyssey through the empty world, travelling on motorways overlaid by a kind of astroturf which has rendered them immune to colonization by real plants.

Wright's hero does, in the end, find a community of people living on the shores of Loch Ness, their culture still in decline and full of wretched ironies (this section of the text is called "The Scottish Play" and features a suitably peculiar Laird and Lady MacBeth). The visitor from the past knows that the new barbarians have no possibility of recovering what their ancestors had and threw away; he is an archaeologist who understands well enough that

excavation is destruction and that civilization "ploughed up the rails behind" when it stripped away the world's reserves of coal and oil. "We had at best one chance to get it right", he says – and that has always been the underlying message of scientific romance, more lachrymose than alarmist in its delivery. Wright's lachrymosity is more modern in its mannerisms than Edward Shanks's or Cicely Hamilton's, but tears are tears no matter how one tries to dignify the business of weeping.

It was not until the aftermath of World War II that Americans realized, by the grace of Stalin's spies, that even they could no longer deem themselves invulnerable to the effects of war. While the all-conquering flood-tide of coca-colonization was all but drowning scientific romance, therefore, science fiction took on an apocalyptic edge of its own. That edge was, however, always blunted by science fiction's own precious variant of the American Dream: the conquest of space. Who the hell cared that Earthly civilization was doomed, so long as the final frontier was there to welcome the most enterprising of its refugees?

The lachrymosity of such classic works of sf as *The Martian Chronicles* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* was decisively altered by virtue of the fact that the weepers' eyes were, at the end if not the beginning, raised heavenwards. Awareness of impending ecocatastrophe has been countered in much the same way by more recent sf, which has produced multitudinous images of Edenic other worlds. Would-be alarmists have found it frustratingly difficult to sweep aside that ridiculous litter and bring home the realization that there will be nowhere to fly when we have irredeemably

But the Platitudes Linger

Brian Stableford

BOOKS



REVIEWED



fouled our nest. Fortunately, the most effective response to frustration is to try harder and to cut deeper, and that is what sf's sceptics have done. It is arguable that there has never been a science-fiction novel which cuts quite as deep as Michael Swanwick's *Jack Faust* (Avon, \$23; Millennium, £16.99 hc or £9.99 tpb).

Like *A Scientific Romance*, *Jack Faust* is exactly what it says it is: a version of Faust recast for the 20th century. It imagines that the ambitious scholar really did discover a reliable source of knowledge, which volunteered to tell him *anything* – provided only that he would consent to listen. This exceptionally well-informed alien Mephistopheles is honest enough to tell his victim exactly *why* he wants Faust to listen – because he wishes to see humankind annihilated and is confident that knowledge is a sure route to self-destruction – but poor vainglorious Faust thinks he knows better. The entire heritage of scientific knowledge and technology is promptly laid before him, to communicate to his fellows as best he can. Then Swanwick proceeds with great flair and conviction (not to mention monumental sarcasm) to map out a high road of good intention which heads straight for Hell, astroturfed for convenience every step of the way.

Jack Faust is, in a sense, a perfectly horrid book. It flatly contradicts the tacit assumption of the entire tradition of American science fiction that Enlightenment is the ultimate good: that knowledge and reason are the only things which can, and very probably will, save us from the worst effects of our collective passions. Swanwick argues the contrary case: that our collective passions are so powerful and so inescapable that Enlightenment only increases the probability that our enmities will have fatal consequences, not merely for our enemies but for ourselves. This is exactly what Bertrand Russell argued, in *Icarus; or, the Future of Science*, in response to J. B. S. Haldane's *Daedalus; or, Science and the Future* (both issued in 1924), but it has never been argued as cleverly, as elegantly or as powerfully as it is in *Jack Faust*.

The legend of Faust was no sooner introduced to literary analysis than it was entangled by the apologetics of Literary Satanism; Marlowe may not have been fully aware that he was of the Devil's party but Goethe certainly was, and was determined that it was where he wanted to be. If I had been asked my opinion a week ago I might well have opined that there was no way back from Goethe's ringing defence of Faustian ambition, but Swanwick does not even take leave to abandon those elements of the legend that were added by Goethe to facilitate the rescue. Margarete is in *Jack Faust* to leaven Faust's ambition with love, and he loves her as fervently – if not quite as honestly and boldly – as she

loves him. Their love retains its strength and depth even when the time comes for poor Margarete to make some final account of the consequences of her affections and ambitions, but it cannot save either of them and its only *ultimate* effect is to hasten Faust along his highway to Hell. Even in the blackest nightmares previously produced by American science fiction love was allowed *some* redemptive value, but *Jack Faust* is relentless, and persuasively so. In Swanwick's reckoning, passion is passion, and all of it leads to destruction.

What hope is left, then, for the futures of science fiction? Can the desire to believe that *true* Enlightenment still lurks at the bottom of Pandora's Box bear any but withered and poison fruit? If it can, we must look to writers more ingenious than those who have so far formed the backbone of the genre. If there is any real hope for future salvation it must be found in robust myths of cosmic escape that make a determined and effective attempt to avoid the traps so blackly laid out in *Jack Faust*. Perhaps it is not surprising that the one man who seems capable of that, at present, is neither British nor American but Australian, thus set to stand outside both of the opposed traditions of scientific romance and science fiction. There is a certain delicious irony in the fact that *Jack Faust* is scheduled for UK publication on the same day, and from the same source, as Greg Egan's *Diaspora* (Millennium, £16.99 hc or £9.99 tpb).

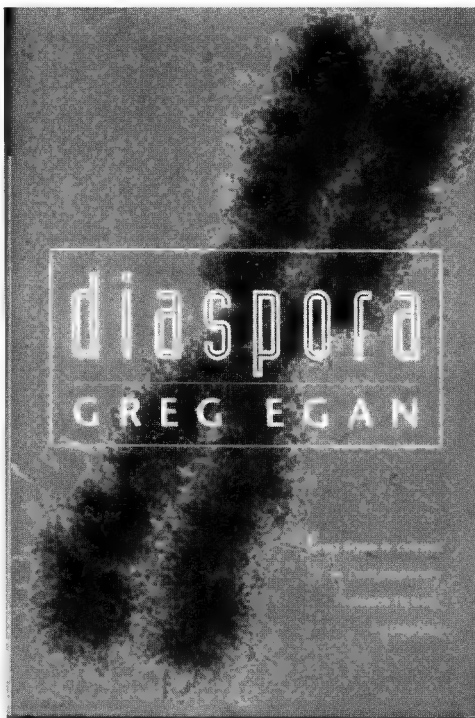
Although *Diaspora* is not a misleading title it is not nearly as exact as *A Scientific Romance* or *Jack Faust*; writers who find their true vocation within sf usually cultivate a certain expertise in the art of telling understatement.

The novel is indeed an account of a diaspora forced on the inhabitants of Earth by the discovery that a burst of gamma rays released by a collapsing binary star is about to devastate the Earth's ecosphere, but the news is brought to the last "flesher" remnants of humankind by the inhabitants of a polis (a community of conscious software) who have received it from a gleisner (a flesher-shaped robot). The fleshers react exactly as the kind of individuals for whom Jack Faust is an apt allegorical symbol might be expected to react. First they refuse to believe it, then they go ape (except, of course, for the "dream apes" who have already surrendered the burden of intelligence in order to return to the Edenic womb of thought).

The only fleshers who survive *Diaspora*'s ecocatastrophe are those who are unceremoniously dragged into the polises by means of Introdus software; no black MacBeths are left behind to measure the grisly failure of humankind's vaulting ambition. In Egan's imperious view, however, this hardly matters. The heritage of human knowledge and wisdom passes to those who were always best-fitted to receive and appreciate it: the software folk. Happily, they are also far better equipped to withstand the emotional rigours of interstellar travel than their unreformed ancestors.

In each of Egan's first three novels – *Quarantine*, *Permutation City* and *Distress* – human beings occupied a very special place in the universe by virtue of being its observers, but *Diaspora* represents a crucial break with the anthropic principle. Here, observation is impotent in the face of a haphazard disaster which is brutally objective in its reality. Contemporary physics is not only impotent to prevent or predict the sudden collapse of Lacerta G-1 but impotent to produce the sort of wormhole that might provide a short cut to the stars. When it eventually turns out that the galactic core is about to go the same way as Lac G-1, thus sterilizing the entire galaxy, extreme measures are required to facilitate a further escape.

Even though they have purged themselves of all the old passions, transforming themselves into the kind of community which could have welcomed Jack Faust with open arms, Egan's polises still require a Mephistopheles to take them by the metaphorical hand and show them the signposts which lead to the macroverse – and then on, and on, and on, not quite *ad infinitum* but far enough to convince even the most atavistic among them that the best way to be is to commit oneself to solitary, dispassionate labour in the Truth Mines. This is not a Heaven which would be attractive to everyone – but it is, in its own sweet way, every bit as magnificent as Jack Faust's Hell. In any case, what other salvation is now imaginable? If our machines cannot replace and redeem us, what hope can we possibly





have of any kind of immortality?

Those who can find no consolation in Egan's Utopia still have a few alternative brands waiting on the supermarket shelves. One reason why Egan has abandoned his clever variations on the theme of the anthropic principle is that such explorations have already been taken to their extreme by Frank Tipler in *The Physics of Immortality*, which suggests that it does not matter a damn what we do to the Earth or to ourselves because we will all be saved in the end by the ultimate computer, which will reincarnate each and every one of us at the Omega Point, as a sideline to the job of redesigning the universe so that the next Big Bang won't be quite as messy as the last one. Recreation has the advantage of unlimited flexibility, implying on the one hand that we can be re-created without our troublesome warts, and on the other that if wartiness were still required we could have it in spades.

In Tipler's scheme, it is not only our humankind which can be reproduced but all conceivable humankinds. This is his gift both to the despairing man in the street and the despairing science-fiction writer, who has already seen the popularity of fantasy devour his marketplace as avidly as the universally-anticipated ecocatastrophe will devour the world. There comes a time in the life of every marginalized science-fiction writer (in this instance the British are marginalized by definition) when he realizes that if he hopes to make any money he had better try to disguise his next magnum opus as a fantasy trilogy. Thus, Brian Aldiss wrote *Helliconia Spring* et al, Bob Shaw *The Ragged Astronauts* et al, Ian Watson *The Book of the River* et al, and now Paul J. McAuley has written *Child of the River: The First Book of Confluence* (Gollancz, £16.99).

Child of the River offers us a Utopia far less sterile than the one in *Diaspora*, whose inhabitants are fortunate enough to be able to spend all such time as they do not devote to the search for the secrets of their genetic heritage in hitting one another with crude but sometimes magical weapons. This enables their story to zip along at a fair old pace, drenched in melodrama every step of the way – thus ensuring (hopefully, at least) that they do not lose the attention and interest of the better kind of reader. (From the point of view of the writer the better kind of reader is, of course, the more numerous kind.)

Being a writer of good conscience as well as some artistry, McAuley does take the trouble to inform us that the miscellaneous barbarians distributed along the shores of his exceedingly long river are not actually living in Heaven, because Heaven lies on the other side of the black hole into which the Pre-servers disappeared. What remains in the artificial milieu of *Confluence* is a

kind of Purgatory which is almost, but not quite, beyond redemption – and the hero of the story is the lucky superman who just might be its redeemer. We shall have to wait until volume three to find out, but that's the way the game is played. I have every confidence that McAuley – who is not the kind of "make it up as you go" writer who is likely to be caught with his pants down when the time comes to fabricate a conclusion – will make a much better fist of it than Philip José Farmer did in the *Riverworld* series.

I wish that I could like *Child of the River* more than I do, but when it is set beside *Jack Faust* and *Diaspora* it seems to me to be clinging too hard to conventional narrative props – so hard, in fact, that the props have become crutches and the real story's legs are in danger of wasting away. On the whole, however, I am very glad to have been sent all four of these books in a single batch, because it is very unlikely that the remainder of the year's production could produce another quartet half as impressive. If *Jack Faust* and *Diaspora* fail to win awards it will be because they are too uncomfortable for the voters to bear, and although *A Scientific Romance* and *Child of the River* stick more tightly to the tried-and-true conventions of their respective genres they are sufficiently thoughtful and sufficiently elegant in expression to act as efficient counterweights to the more challenging texts.

There is a crucial moment in *Diaspora* when citizens of a polis go to the rescue of the fleshers of Atlanta, only to be rudely rebuffed. The fleshier who responds to their appeal gazes at his would-be saviours "with a kind of fascinated loathing." His rant in defence of his right to remain untroubled concludes: "We humans are fallen creatures; we'll never come crawling on our bellies into your ersatz Garden of Eden. I tell you this: there will always be flesh, there will always be sin, there will always be dreams and madness, war and famine, torture and slavery." (p.92)

A Scientific Romance, *Jack Faust*, *Diaspora* and *Child of the River* agree with every element of this tirade save one, which they consider self-contradictory; the one thing they all agree upon is that while there are sin, dreams, madness, war, famine, torture and slavery then flesh cannot endure forever. Only *Diaspora*, however, offers us an authentic alternative; only *Diaspora* subjects the fleshier rant to scathingly casual dismissal in order that the plot can get on with other and further business.

"I thought religion was long gone, even among the statics," is one software person's amazed response to the fleshier's imbecility.

"God is dead," agrees the other sadly, "but the platitudes linger."

Brian Stableford

A Good New Fantasy

Chris Gilmore

Many books are over-hyped by their blurb-writers, but they've given new author Tom Arden's *The Harlequin's Dance* (Gollancz, £16.99) less than its due. It's presented as the start of a bog-standard S&S quest, with the trifling differences that the ambient technology is 18th-century (instead of somewhere in the usual continuum from bronze age to renaissance), and five volumes are planned instead of three or four. Big deal, but in fact it's something a lot better.

Following a bruising civil war in which a brother successfully usurped his identical twin, two children from families on the losing side are growing up in a rural backwater, near to but not in contact with each other. Jemany, a bastard got (apparently) by the charming and high-born Torvister on his own sister, has congenitally malformed legs and is being brought up by his languid mother, a slatternly servant-girl and a god-struck maiden great-aunt among the faded splendours of his largely ruined and cursorily looted castle. The only colour in his life is provided by Barnabas, a mysterious mute dwarf who may have magical powers or may only be a master of illusion – perhaps a bit of both.

Catayane, meanwhile, is being reared as a "child of nature" by her widowed father, Silas Wolveron. The victors have blinded him for his part in the war, which up to now has discommoded him little, as he possesses a form of magical perception confusingly referred to as "night vision"; but that is fading with age. Cata has her own natural magic, which confers empathy with the thoughts and feelings of animals. It gives her great spiritual comfort, but is of little practical use.

Trouble a-plenty is surely in store for such a couple, and Arden develops his tale skilfully, switching viewpoints between them and the characters who influence them, with heavy use of flashback to the young lives of the previous generation. His has a fine eye for the grotesque, and the wit to expose it; together they contribute an edge of hysteria to the sense of mounting foreboding. There are passages which recall Mervyn Peake and Jack Vance, who would surely approve his heavies

in particular; and if he never writes quite as well as either at their best, he has their tail-lights well in view – which is infinitely more than can be said for most practitioners in this field.

It's therefore the more surprising that he commits several common solecisms: may for might, disinterest for uninterest, aureoles for areolas, etc. Doubtless he had a weak English teacher, so the more credit to him for writing as well as he does; but don't editors bother with even the simplest editing these days? My only other gripe is that Arden seems to believe you can turn a fat, drunken slob into a handsome, athletic young man simply by starving him for a few days. Believe me, were it possible I'd have tried it.

What with all that, and lavish use of ornamentation, little actually happens in the first 200 pages – which is fair enough, given that at this rate the whole book will go over 2,000. A five-volume novel is usually a daunting prospect, but if Arden can sustain the present standard, this is one to relish.

Among Poul Anderson's minor achievements is his reconstruction of *Hrolf Kraki's Saga*, a compilation from various sources of a corrupt and fragmentary legend. He has now set about a similar task with *War of the Gods* (Tor, \$22.95), reconstructing (mainly from Saxo Grammaticus) the no less obscure, corrupt and fragmentary tale of Prince Hadding Gramsson. Rightful (in some eyes) heir to all Denmark, Hadding was exiled in babyhood into the care of a family of uncouth giants, lest he pay with his blood for his blood and its heritage of vengeance sought and to seek.

There are many possible approaches to such a story, and I suspect its fragmentary character determined Anderson's. Having to interpolate several minor episodes, and even more bridge passages, he has chosen to write it up in a consciously archaic style, avoiding non-Germanic roots wherever possible. The intention, I think, is to give the rough-hewn effect of something newly re-discovered; fully comprehensible but still emerging from, and of a piece with, the rugged poetry of a less self-conscious age. Thus emerge such lines as: "Spindrift sleeted blinding and bitter. It stung where it struck." To an extent this may even reflect his closeness to Saxo's text. It may be that, just as Saxo translated fragments of Germanic alliterative verse into Latin, they naturally fall back into fragments of alliterative verse when translated back, with maximum conservatism, into a Germanic tongue.

Among the risks of such an approach is that it generates its own clichés: all too often armies are "hosts," woodland is "shaw,"

cattle are "kine." These expressions, being commonplace, irritate in a way that words like "sax," "wadmal" and "gurley," which had me scampering to a large dictionary, did not. Less obviously, the many archaic expressions that pepper the text don't always sit happily with modern notions of realism. For instance, after his first battle we are told that Hadding "threw up," and elsewhere there are references to hangovers. Good Germanic words, and entirely credible in the circumstances, but wrong, I think, because the Eddas and Sagas would not have dwelt on such matters.

At the other extreme, a youthful but dishevelled giantess is described as "sightly" in the eyes of the ordinary men who encounter her. In the context "comely" is the obvious choice, so one is left wondering why Anderson has chosen to revive the defunct positive of an adjective now only encountered in its negative form. I think the intention is to remind the reader that he is revisiting an earlier phase of the language, before certain words had fallen casualty to ill luck or ill use, but I'm far from sure of this and being constantly drawn into such speculations slows the narrative.

That is a pity, because Anderson has knit Saxo's sparse tale into the well-balanced biography of hero from the late Germanic epoch. Hadding is a man of greater valour, virtue and foresight than most, but is nonetheless a man of his times, and his times are among the most brutal of the heroic age. As king he dispenses his own justice, which can include hanging for dereliction of duty towards, or grand theft from, himself; as husband he keeps a leman in his hall

and resorts to her at whim – and certainly if his wife has her "courses"; as general he sees that his own wounded are tended if he can, and slashes the throats of enemy wounded if he has time; and to keep his army fresh he goes raiding his weaker neighbours.

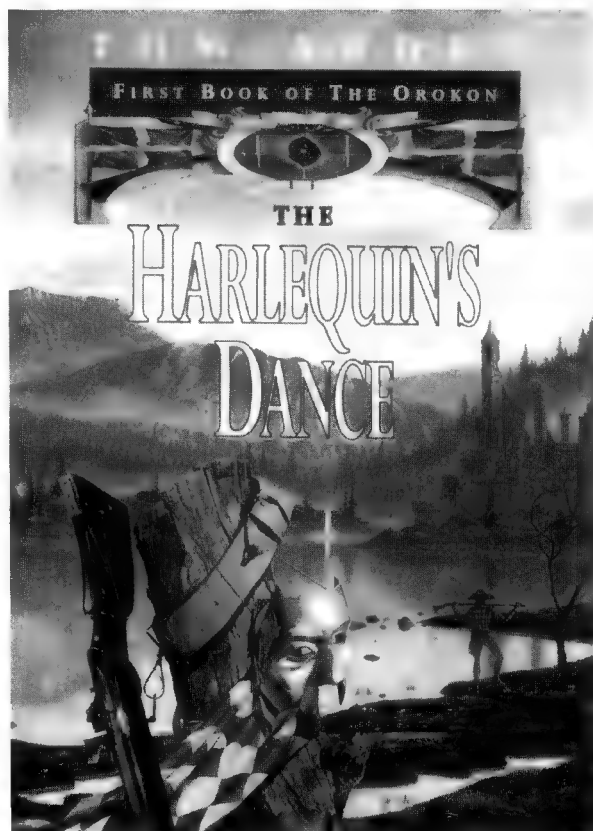
Anderson make no apology for any of these, but he subtly implies that it is upon the practices of Hadding and his like that the foundations of our own, gentler society were laid – and that we would do well not to forget how recent and how frail those foundations are. Well enough, but that consideration sits ill with the sense that Hadding possesses a supernatural quality, and which is supposed to promote the story from legend to myth. In fact the mythic element has a tacked-on look to it; Hadding is acceptable as a hero, but lacks credibility as a god.

And the story? It's the usual sort of story, episodic in character, gory in detail, fatalistic in atmosphere and spiked with sinister, chthonic Norse magic. Anderson describes it as dark, even by the standards of its time, but it's sweetness and light compared to much that our own century has to offer. I'd recommend it for the older children except that they would very likely adopt without comprehending the most superficial and deleterious aspects of its style. One for the specialist, therefore – Stephan Grundy should love it.

It's some years since I've heard anyone lament the loss of "the sense of wonder" from sf, but should that dormant debate erupt again I'll refer the participants to the works of A. A. Attanasio. His latest, *Centuries* (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99), displays the wide range, lush writing and general implausibility wherein wonder thrives.

In the next century CIRCLE, the Centre of International Research for the Continuance of Life on Earth, is trying two rather desperate approaches to solve the problems inherited from this one: to produce an artificial intelligence of sufficient power to work out the answers, or to produce Anthrofacts, *Friday*-style people of sufficiently enhanced intelligence to do the same job. The mechanical approach pays off first, so it's decided to kill off the teenage super-geniuses lest they supplant mankind.

But one, Rafe von Takawa, escapes with the help of his "handler," Ellen Vancet, who has grown fond of him. He has a handy way of reproducing his kind, who rapidly enhance themselves yet further into a state which they call Maat, and take over the Earth. Rather sportingly in the circumstances, they permit "Aboriginal" humanity to survive and prosper in a variety of reservations.



The rest of the book follows the further adventures of Rafe, Ellen and the original Machine Intelligence (now rendered obsolete and resentful) down the next thousand years. Along with everyone else they have been rendered virtually immortal, but they remain vulnerable to accident or malice, and such is looming on a grand scale. Certain of the Maat are tired of this universe and wish to take up a fuller life in a meta-dimension. It's not currently achievable, but they're working on the problem – you just have to collapse the entire universe, then ride the inward shockwave. A pity about the Aborigines etc., but you can't make an omelette...

And there lies the problem. I'm prepared to accept that beings of immensely superior intelligence might harbour such an ambition, and even seek to justify it; but no way will I accept that a superior intelligence would present a rationalization as weak as this:

You must understand, our universe is not singular. There are [sic] an incalculable number of universes in the multiverse. The Maat would simply be collapsing one of an infinite set. Whereas when a hunter slays a deer, they [sic] kill one of a finite set and so by ratio are responsible for a far greater act of destruction and selfishness.

Almost as bad is AAA's "scientific" version of the afterlife, from which the dead gibber much the same pious inanities as were once evoked by Mrs Doris Stokes, though there's a bit more fun when Rafe spends some time as a ghost.

Such avoidable *sottises* aside, a book of this span inevitably requires data-dumps, and AAA is all too fond of the kind of hectoring conversation in which people expound to others what one might well have expected them to know already. He also recapitulates his data at odd points as the book progresses, making me wonder if it's not some kind of fix-up, though the prelims make no mention of previous serial publication.

Yet there are some very good passages, including some excellent jokes. Rafe encounters a realization of the most tediously pious style of 1920s Utopia, where everyone is loving, artistic, natural, unselfish and *happy*. He becomes deeply enamoured of this triumphant vindication of human values, and makes a long, sentimental speech in praise thereof, only to be tricked into – no, I won't spoil it, read the book yourself. Almost equally good is the passage where the Machine, by now incarnate as a woman of Amazonian beauty, attempts to seduce Rafe with a combination of mechanical logic and untried feminine wiles.

I only wish the rest of the book

sustained that standard, but while AAA certainly has plenty of talent for visualization, he seems to have no standards at all, especially when coining new words. How does "predacious" differ from "predatory"? In adjacent paragraphs one encounters "ponderable depths" and a meal "prepared over a compact electric grill." Me, I'm prepared to ponder anything, but I normally cook *under* the grill. It seems impossible that someone who can write so badly could also have composed such gorgeous mock-profundities as "To drink of the milk of the sphinx, sense is not a vessel but a sieve." and "When the flame is blown out, the candle listens to darkness." Altogether, *Centuries* reads like the raw first draft of something distinguished – but then, so did *Radix*.

I suppose I should mention for completeness that the word Maat links *Centuries* to *Solis* (reviewed in *Interzone* 87), and there's another, very tenuous, link to *The Last Legends of Earth*, but the books stand (or fall) alone.

It's in the nature of things that, if the author is at all explicit about dates, the credibility of very-near-future sf will suffer erosion by events. As I am writing this in 1997, Philip Caveney's *1999* (Headline, £17.99) has to be an extreme case, but it's even worse than it looks; it is this book's unenviable distinction to have been superseded before it saw print.

It's a polemic against the Evils of Thatcherism, apparently based on the assumption that the Conservative Party would be re-elected in 1997, whereupon everything would go pear-

shaped in the manner which has been predicted continuously since 1979. Ragged beggars throng the streets, the war against drugs has been abandoned in favour of controlling and taxing their use (not a bad idea, in my view), all environmental legislation is ignored or scrapped, urban outcasts practise cannibalism in the sewers – and Manchester City Council is squandering the people's taxes on an inane millennial exhibition. One out of six is better than a washout, but as Sprague de Camp remarked, "It doesn't pay a prophet to be too specific."

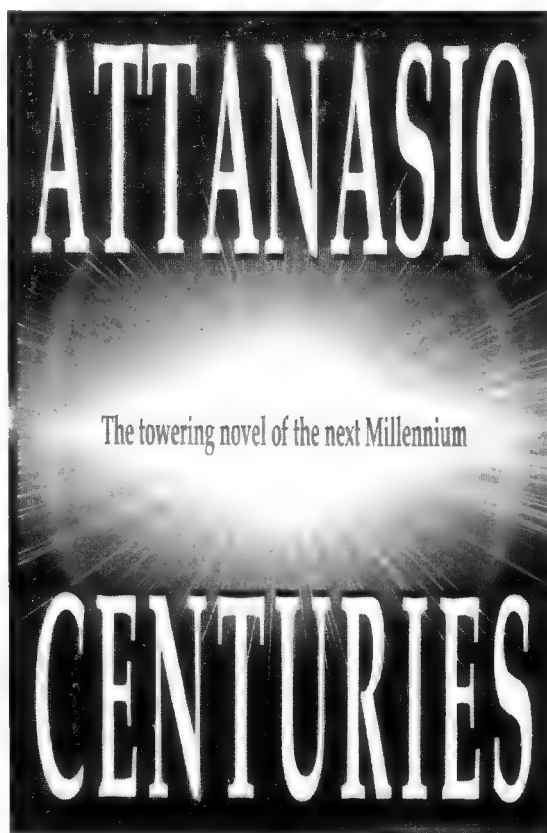
There are also elements of what look more like wish-fulfilment prophecy, including that the English monarchy will have been dissolved (by which I presume Caveney means removed from the Constitution) by 2010.

One could be charitable and treat this as an alternate-world story, but neither its construction nor its atmosphere supports such an interpretation – it's too obviously an "If This Goes On"-style moral tale with a message. That message is: "Hate one another, by categories, and according to the most rigid interpretation of the Marxist Class War." The categories for whom our hatred is solicited are the professional /entrepreneurial classes, the police and most of all Freemasons. Why? Don't ask me. In other times and contexts it would have been Jews, *pieds noirs*, Huguenots, rich peasants, Untouchables or those who failed to aspirate the initial consonant of Shioleth.

And the story? Martin Ambrose, teenage airhead, having overdosed on an illegal drug, kills his girlfriend Sophie before falling into terminal coma. Will, his father, a policeman winkled out of the force for refusing to become a Mason (I swear I'm not making this up) decides to Do Something About It. That he finds surprisingly easy, given help from Scally (a street child), Tom (the last honest reporter in Manchester), and the total ineptitude of the opposition, who dish out handy pointers whenever the trail looks like getting cold.

There follows sundry mayhem punctuated by long speeches of ineane pomposity and short ones of tired obscenity. No effort of Caveney's can persuade his characters to come alive, and the reflection that their two-years-younger selves are (by the book's own logic) alive and well in contemporary Manchester, contributes the only amusement I could draw from a psychologically and economically illiterate, witless and, in its sanctimonious self-indulgence, thoroughly nasty piece of work. As for the atmosphere, neither Will nor anyone else expresses the least regret for the murdered Sophie or her family, which really says it all.

Chris Gilmore



Despite 428 of its 444 pages being the best in its own unique genre for many years, Will Shetterly's quietly ambitious new novel *Dogland* (Tor, \$25.95) is almost irredeemably scuppered by its last chapter. And that's a real shame because the overall concept of the book, its detailed characterization, the painstaking backdrop of the American South in transition during the late 1950s and early 60s, honest-to-God believable dialogue and Shetterly's delightful round-the-campfire storytelling all looked set, as the narrative progressed, to make a Pulitzer nomination entirely feasible.

The difficulty – to me, at least – stems from the fact that the genre we're talking about is the "rite of passage" novel, while Tor, as far as I am aware, is strictly a science fiction-and-fantasy publisher... and it is only *Dogland's* final 17 pages – essentially a dream sequence, and a somewhat clumsy and contrived one at that – which could possibly qualify it for admittance (and then only arguably).

The fact is that *Dogland* could have stood proudly alongside Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, King's "The Body," Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* and much of Erskine Caldwell's work... but even that compliment would be hollow indeed when one considers that *Dogland's* advance proofs proclaim the novel to be a fantasy. Thus, it loses two ways: fantasy readers drawn to the book will almost certainly be disappointed, while readers searching for more of the down-home text of Fannie Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* and *Daisy Fay and the Miracle Man* will pass it by altogether... mainly because it'll be displayed in another part of the store.

Tucked between *Dogland's* covers is a story of enormous depth, an almost textbook treatise on Americana, race relations, religion and growing up, all recorded through the eyes of a young boy whose father moves the family down to Florida from a Minnesota farm in 1960 to start up a roadside diner-cum-tourist attraction displaying various breeds of dog.

The writing is at once engagingly accessible and wonderfully dense, a fresh take on mixed-colour communities in the American South. The story, unfolded against a detailed but unobtrusive backdrop of events in the country at large, occasionally hints at some underlying strangeness, though with the exception of the now infamous final chapter this is never fully delivered. Nor should it be.

Like the very best of Ray Bradbury's small-town sagas of people on the cusp of adolescence, when summers stretch seemingly to infinity and a fella's most-treasured possessions are comicbooks and sneakers, Shetterly's obvious strength on this outing is to get inside a six-year-old's mind and attempt to make sense of the snippets of conversation he overhears while basically doing his chores and getting in everyone's

Gone to the Dogs?

Peter Crowther

way. That in itself is Fantasy *par excellence*: the telling of a tale of human failings and weaknesses, sketched with almost loving precision by innuendo, ambiguity and only partly-understood (if it's understood at all) adult dialogue, which is surely akin to the very best literary examples of an outsider's attempts to come to terms with the so-called norm. And the beauty of it is, we've all been there... and many of us are privileged to know – or to have known – a few six-year-old people who are there now, trying to make sense of our world and what we do with it.

Sadly, for this reader at least, one is left convinced that a more conventional tying-up of loose ends and plot threads would have resulted in a far more complete and satisfying experience. But, gripes aside, the bottom line of this review has to be to tell you to search out this strange, beautiful and poignant book and buy it at all costs... just don't bother with the final chapter. Writing of this standard is so hard to come by that one should be prepared to make allowances.

Of course, it was only a matter of time before the success of Stephen King's epic *Green Mile* saga prompted another writer to try his or her hand with the concept of the unfolding part-work novel. Sad to say, the only contender thus far – John Saul's *The Blackstone Chronicles* (six volumes, published by Ballantine's Fawcett Crest imprint at \$2.99 apiece) – is a very pale imitation indeed.

They're tearing down the old asylum in Blackstone and someone is sending strange and seemingly innocuous (at least initially) gifts to the town's leading residents and each volume concentrates on one such item – hence volume one being *An Eye for an Eye: The Doll* and volume two being *Twist of Fate: The Locket*, and so on. And that's the first problem right there. This is not so much a serialized novel as a loosely-linked series of connecting stories, each of which is really a stand-alone piece.

The second and more serious problem is that it's not very good: the stories themselves lack any real suspense, the characters are straight out of central casting and the plotting is cheesy and contrived – something more fitted to daytime gothic soaps such as *Dark Shadows* or the equally hammy fare

put out by Hammer in the early 1970s... or maybe even one of those *Mad* magazine parodies of the old creaking-door mystery shows from the golden days of radio.

Dusty attics and *deus-ex-machina* endings abound while melodramatic dialogue and descriptions lifted straight from the Horror Writers' Thesaurus render the whole thing quite laughable. Imitation may be the most sincere form of flattery but even the most casual comparison between *The Blackstone Chronicles* and King's *Green Mile* proves beyond any doubt that you can't give a magician's wand to a member of the audience and have him to do tricks. If you're really desperate, try tracking down copies of Michael McDowell's *Blackwater* sextet – released by Avon over six consecutive months in 1983 – to see how it can be done (and while you're at it, keep an eye peeled for McDowell's stunning novel *The Elements* from 1981... but I digress).

A would-be suicide goes to a 49th-floor, turn-of-the-millennium party to make a final jump down to the sidewalk only to discover that one of his co-revellers is none other than Bacchus. The God of Wine provides this monumental manic depressive with a "party hat" (which enables him to understand any language, written or spoken), a "party trumpet" (the blowing of which transports him to other celebratory events, either real or fictional, up and down the ages) and some "party confetti" (to sprinkle upon anyone or anything he wishes to accompany him on his journey). His first port of call is the Mad Hatter's Tea Party and then it's onwards to further experiences... with the Dormouse in tow!

Welcome to the wild and wickedly wacky world of Paul Di Filippo and "Mama Told Me Not to Come," one of the stories in his new collection *Fractal Paisleys* (Four Walls Eight Windows, \$20). Di Filippo is, of course, no stranger to the pages of *Interzone* – as three of the 10 featured stories can testify – so regular *IZ* readers should need little by way of introduction. For others, know this: this man has a combined imagination and talent that is singular, boundless and remarkable.

In "Do You Believe in Magic?" a '60s burnout who has lived a hermit's existence for some 20 years, with only his beloved vinyl record collection for company, ventures out into the post-millennium mean streets after he inadvertently sits on and crushes his mint copy of The Lovin' Spoonful's debut album. His "Kozmic Kwest" is to find a replacement... but the world he finds out there is somewhat drastically different.

The protagonist of "Lennon Spex" (as Di Filippo would have it, the "B" side to his "The Cobain Sweater" from *IZ* earlier this year) buys the late Beatle's glasses – complete with bloodstain on one of the stems – through which he can discern people's affections for things and for

other people... shown as coloured cords extending from the tops of their heads. And in "Master Blaster and Whammer Jammer Meet the Groove Thang" a couple of Cheech and Chong types encounter an alien creature which emanates a feel-good aura better than the high provided by any illegal substance – the only difficulty is keeping the creature in one place for any length of time.

Di Filippo dedicates the collection to, among others, Thorne Smith and certainly the great *Topper*-man's inspiration is clearly in evidence, particularly in the title story. Elsewhere there is similarly effective homage to Douglas Adams, Philip K. Dick, Harlan Ellison and Damon Runyon... but the overall beat and melody is very much Di Filippo's own. The man is a treasure. As is this wonderfully warm and hilarious book. Sample it today.

buy not one but *two* copies of Love's new single "The Castle"... one to play and one to wear about their necks. My, but those were strange times when you think about it.

However, having just finished it (and now re-reading one or two particularly choice tales, simply getting lost in the writing and the language), I feel sorely tempted to make the same recommendation about Brian McNaughton's collection, *The Throne of Bones* (Terminal Fright Books, 343pp, \$35).

McNaughton's tales of an otherworldly land are reminiscent of Clark Ashton Smith's inhospitable landscapes of Zothique and Hyperborea and the old Robert E. Howard Conan tales – so perfectly re-created during the very early run of Marvel's comicbook adaptation – where the mighty-thewed barbarian would encounter all manner of bizarre monstrosities which only the most fevered imagination could conceive.

Here are ghouls who collect in small communities to prey on unwitting passers-by... only to devour their own young when pickings are slow; an intruder whose head splits apart to allow a monstrous worm to escape and subsume the body... and then anyone unfortunate enough to be nearby; and the Land of the Dead, its entrance

shrouded by the Cephalune Hills, but whose dubious attractions include sexually-active cadavers (whose excitement may be enhanced by the stroking of their "ashy lust") and a vat of "feculent slime" which can make the most grossly mangled corpse look better than new.

McNaughton's world is a mixture of mythology and prehistory, a land of unpronounceable but strangely sensible names, a dark place filled with old caves in which to shelter from storms, ruined and empty cities and endless inhospitable deserts, through which all manner of hideous creatures roam – some vaguely human and others not vaguely *anything* – and all of them on the lookout for warm flesh... either to eat or for some other reason too horrific even to consider. Certainly three (at least) of these tales – "Reunion in Cephalune," "A Scholar from Sythiphore" and the 150-page multi-part epic title story (particularly the segment entitled "The Ghoul's Child") – deserve their place on any serious reading list of classic gothic horror.

As Peely might once have said, in his characteristic Liverpool-cum-mid-Atlantic drawl, "Not far removed from being a treat." And then some.

Pete Crowther

And while we're on the subject of music...

I remember back in the '60s when John Peel, on his Sunday afternoon radio show *Top Gear*, advised those listeners strewn across gardens and parks throughout the land (of which I was one... a listener, not a garden nor a park) that they should rush out and

Ann Kennedy's *The Silver Web* (A4 p/b, 90pp, \$7, or \$14 for two, overseas, from Buzzcity Press, PO Box 38190, Tallahassee, FL 32315, USA) has recently upgraded its appearance and page-count even though the magazine already looked perfect. #14 is 90 pages thick and perfect-bound with a full-colour, laminated cover. The cover artwork is by featured artist Rodger Gerberding, who is interviewed by Poppy Z. Brite, neither of whom are strangers to controversy, which makes for a fascinating conversation (Gerberding is a very frank interviewee, for which some credit is no doubt due to the interviewer). His artwork, as is that of all the artists (World Fantasy Award-winning Alan M. Clark, H. E. Fassel, many others), is wonderful: exotic, evocative, unsettling, fascinating, you name it.

These descriptions could equally be applied to *The Silver Web*'s fiction, and I can only reiterate what countless other reviewers have said before me: it is of a quality practically unmatched anywhere in the world. It would be unwise, however, to actually compare it to any specific title. All the best magazines are unique. Certain British magazines, for example, excel at what might be termed superrealism while *The Silver Web*, in this issue anyway, is very definitely surreal.

An exception to this admittedly vague rule is Joel Lane's "The Spoils," a typical (but typically outstanding) tale of urban menace and, given the story's bizarre twist, justifiable paranoia. Similarly grounded in reality is the extract from Jack Ketchum's new

Magazine Reviews

Andy Cox

novel *Red*, the story of how an uncomplicated man's life is changed by the sudden, violent death of his faithful old dog. It's a fine, moving excerpt that also manages to be a crafty bit of promo, coming as it does from the beginning of the book and ending just as we're *really* getting into it. I, for one, will now be buying the book. Incidentally, we learn from the conversation preceding the extract that Ketchum, an American writer whose prose is clearly not particularly "British," could not get *Red* published in America "to save [his] life," but Headline in England thought enough of it to bring it out in both hardback and paperback. We learn from another revealing interview that Jonathan Carroll has had similar problems with his work.

The other stories are more overtly surreal: exquisite word-paintings, beautifully, lovingly rendered, so much so that if the previous issue was the "music issue" then this one could almost be the "art issue." Indeed, the first full page piece of artwork we encounter after the cover is "Mona," a pretty damn fine take on the original by David Walters (I'll assume you realize by now that the added surrealism is a given!) which accompanies Claire Robson's equally fine take on the art world "Art Cannot Hurt You." And for the epitome of surreal fiction – and I mean true surrealism, work that uses apparently incongruous, unconscious images to purposefully transcend reality as opposed to just being pointlessly strange – look no further than Gary Archambault's astonishing, dreamlike "Falling Awake to the Here in Now



Brightly."

Sometimes when I catch myself praising something I qualify my comments by finding points to criticize. Perhaps I feel you won't believe me otherwise. But, believe me, there is *nothing* here to criticize.

The kind of uniqueness to be found in *The Silver Web* is all too rare in the British small press, as are its kind of production standards. American magazines have an advantage of course, in that they have so many more potential readers: publishers can presumably sell more copies and find room to cover similar territories. Here, sf magazines are often merely *Interzone* clones, publishing the same sort of stuff but never as well. *Odyssey* (A4, 40pp, £2, or £8 for four, from James Lecky, 3 Bently Terrace, Waterside, Londonderry, N. Ireland BT47 1BN) just manages to avoid being clumped by me into this category for two reasons: its willingness to keep on improving is impressive (regular story contributors like James McConnon and James Lecky himself are coming on in leaps and bounds, and even though production remains fairly basic #8 sees a wise upgrade to A4 format) and, despite a predilection for hackneyed plots and info-dumps, it occasionally offers us something rather different. I wasn't at all surprised, then, to discover that easily the best story in this issue isn't actually science fiction at all, but horror (well, that's its nearest genre). Its author, Jason Gould, has been widely published of late, sometimes with stories that I reckon must embarrass him now that he is beginning to produce some truly exceptional work. "Dust (30-30-32)," in which a lonely student takes up the offer in a contact magazine to meet Paris ("enjoys role-play, dressing up and 'O'"), is deliciously rich in detail and minute observation and flawed only by a tendency to overwrite. Compare the awkward "sensations filtering into the dual-carriageway of my nerves from our rush-houred junction" to the effortless "each bone pressed ambitiously against her skin," used when describing the skinny appearance of Paris. This skinniness, incidentally, is pivotal: Paris becomes less and less substantial until only a dusty resin remains... Watch out for Jason Gould, he's very good.

Watch out for *Odyssey* too. It's the sort of magazine you can't help liking despite its failings. NB: this is the original *Odyssey*, not the recently-announced new magazine which seems to have the same title (unseen).

In *Kimota* #6 (A5, 80pp, £2.50, or £9 for four, from Graeme Hurry, 52 Cadley Causeway, Preston PR2 3RX) the estimable Gary Couzens compares and contrasts genres, illustrating his points with a Venn Diagram that sees "horror" overlapping "fantasy," "science

fiction," "crime" and "mainstream," and itself containing various subsets like "dark sf," "dark fantasy" and "dark mainstream." It's this last subset that in my opinion contains the very best kind of horror fiction. To quote Gary, it is fiction that "locates its horrors within the fabric of contemporary life and the dark side of character. It's more disturbing than scary: it's usually subtler than that." This is what I looked for in *Kimota*. I found that at least three stories feature children, and are told from a child's (or child-like, in the case of Stephen Gallagher's "Poisoned") viewpoint, presumably because it's so much easier to scare child protagonists than to disturb adult ones. If so, then the same rule applies to readers. In a juvenile market such stories would have the desired effect, and the flimsy moral which often comes attached to them might not be out of place, but when they appear in adult magazines like *Kimota* (it says "unsuitable for children" on the cover) they can so easily seem like emotionally unengaging cop-outs.

I'm generalizing to an extent, of course, and besides, there is still much here to enjoy. The sf stories, for instance, display certain charms despite a lack of sophistication, their lack of self-consciousness and irony making for quite refreshing diversions. Elsewhere, Caroline Dunford's less genre-specific "Liam Brown's Amazing Story" has a neat theory behind it – a sort of "luck vampirism" – and remains intriguing despite the fact that it's more or less entirely set in the form of a letter which reads like the author's synopsis: *you've got me interested*, I thought upon finishing it, *now write the story* (all together now: show, don't tell).

Finally, as unofficial president of the unofficial Julie Travis fan club, I must point out "God's Favourite Creatures," the opening two paragraphs of which are extremely unsettling. Picture this: a woman stands before a mirror, power drill in hand, an old Fowler phrenology head on the dressing table beside her; she guides the drill to a certain spot on her forehead, the one marked "respect" on the phrenology head, and pulls the trigger... The third paragraph requires a certain suspension of belief (and a barf bag within easy reach) as she then proceeds to destroy the parts of her brain marked "benevolence," "sociability," "love of family" and so on, until, while on "timidity" the drill slips down a couple of centimetres and buries itself in the spot marked by Fowler as "extermination." Yes, I thought, *this is definitely some kind of horror* – and then suddenly Miss Julie was whisking me off on a tour of just about every other circle on Gary Couzens's Venn Diagram, without once restricting the flow of amazing imagery, ambitious narrative and faultless prose. An outstanding story. For adults.

Andy Cox

Never Mind the Quality

Neil Jones &

Neil McIntosh

Another year and another selection of the best sf of the year from Gardner Dozois, editor of *Asimov's: The Year's Best Science Fiction, Fourteenth Annual Collection* (St Martins Griffin, \$17.95), covering 1996. Best of the year is a big claim to make, and reviewing past volumes, we've ranged between high praise – and grudging approval when we felt some of the choices simply did not deserve the accolade "best."

Leading this year's collection is "Immersion" by Gregory Benford, an entertaining but somewhat unsatisfying tale of chimps and skulduggery. Benford's simian research is both admirable and engaging, but it does show up the story itself (centred around humans temporarily putting their minds into chimp bodies) as just a convenient vehicle for the ideas. And the plot, perhaps rather hastily thrown together, is very much of the idiot variety, with the protagonists getting themselves stranded in their chimp hosts by ignoring the danger all too obvious to the reader. So, this first story, an early benchmark for us readers, sings out very readable and engaging but irritatingly flawed – rather than excellent verging on classic. But in fact the Benford proves to be among the book's better entries – its ideas are fresh, at least.

Far too many of the stories fall into the well-written but dull category, for example Maureen F. McHugh's worthy-but lost-colony saga "The Cost to be Wise," which was a real disappointment given her impressive track record. Robert Reed's "Chrysalis," about a human/alien space-going colony served/controlled by machines is evocative and (probably) worthwhile, but overlong and rather turgid in parts. The aptly-titled "The Land of Nod" by Mike Resnick is part of his Kirinyaga series, about Kikuyu and

space stations, stories from which have won two Hugos and a Nebula and maybe this will too – but although it's actually a thoughtful and well-written story, the protagonist we're presumably supposed to sympathize with is an almost pathologically obstinate and selfish character who is an immense trial to his long-suffering son and, ultimately, to the reader.

William Barton's story of unfolding generations, hopes and tarnished dreams set against the backdrop of the exploration of space is workmanlike when it really needed to be poignant to be effective. Michael Cassutt's "The Longer Voyage" is a yarn about an ecosystem in space, that, like the story, isn't going anywhere. And with a title like Paul Park's "The Last Homosexual" you'd expect a story of depth and significance but this, too, is surprisingly humdrum.

Two stories slip into a subcategory all of their own, the haven't-we-read-this-somewhere-before? yes, several times slot: Robert Silverberg's look at future immortals, "Death Do Us Part," a story with an all too obvious ending, and Michael Swanwick's "The Dead," all about the deceased being brought back as zombies to serve the living.

But the real turkey of the collection, Bud Sparhawk's "Primrose and Thorn," from *Analog*, is hardish sf about sailing in the gaseous Jovian "seas." A great idea (which must be why Dozois selected it) but the characters are very thin cardboard, the story is clogged with impenetrable sailing terminology, and Sparhawk gives us almost zero sense of being in the alien oceans of Jupiter.

Then there are some middling stories: Damien Broderick's "Schrodinger's Dog" actually had a lot working for it – the core idea, using quantum physics to send a single subject back to multiple synchronistic universes, grabs the interest, but the story ultimately suffers from too much fragmentation and can't seem to decide whether to take itself seriously or not. Gwyneth Jones' "Red Sonja and Lessingham in Dreamland," is a mix of virtual reality and sexual politics, interesting, but the PC-points it scores come at the story's expense. Jonathan Lethem's "How We Got into Town and Out Again," the dance marathons of the great depression updated to a similarly scuppered future, has pace and incident but ultimately not a great deal to say. And Stephen Utley's "The Wind Over the Water" tunnel-back-to-the-past starts out strongly but then just fizzles out.

Actually, most of the above stories would probably be acceptable if unexciting between the covers of a good sf magazine. But lauded here as the best of the year, we have the right to question just what it is that is supposed to make them so special. A

neat example of this is Charles Sheffield's "The Lady Vanishes," which is a fine take on a familiar sf idea, a readable story with some good hard sf, but ultimately ordinary.

Two stories (out of 28) we Neils couldn't reach an agreement on: Gene Wolfe's "Counting Cats on Zanzibar," about artificial intelligence and a long sea voyage, and Cherry Wilder's "Dr Tiltman's Consultant: A Scientific Romance," an edge of the Great War piece. One Neil puts them firmly among the misses, the other Neil among the hits. It just goes to show that there's always room for disagreement among the "best."

Tony Daniel has two stories here. The longer piece, "The Robot's Twilight Companion," is about a gentle sentient machine nurturing its own awareness as all around it humankind descends into hell. It has a lot of promise but overall is sprawling and much in need of pruning – it belongs in the worthy-but-dull category. The other, "A Dry Quiet War," imaginatively splices a quasi wild-west saloon-bar setting with a distant-galaxy tale of a soldier returning from a war at the end of time. There's more style than substance, but it's cannily constructed and, a telling point, compact.

Even out of this less-than-bumper collection there are some stories that we both agreed were very good to outstanding (but then, in a book this size there *should* be). From *Interzone*, there's Ian McDonald's vividly-told "Recording Angel," – a doomed continent slowly being subsumed by an alien growth, abandoned buildings rotting like shipwrecks, and an underlying motif of nature reclaiming its own.

James P. Blaylock's "Thirteen Phan-

tasms" is a Bradburyesque tale which tugs at the yearning to recover a lost past. Short and slight, but effective. And Jim Cowan's "The Spade of Reason" play on the philosophy of mathematics has a spookiness that makes it readable and rewarding.

Walter John Williams's "Foreign Devils" is a *War of the Worlds* sidebar piece set amidst the court intrigue of Manchu China, slow but satisfying with a sure feel for period. Nancy Kress's "The Flowers of Aulit Prison" has a very Ursula Le Guin feel, and is intelligent, moving and richly detailed. John Kessel's "The Miracle at Ivar Avenue" is part of a series about a future that can send people back to plunder the past, here to a convincingly evoked Hollywood circa 1947: the writing is strong and confident, and so is the story.

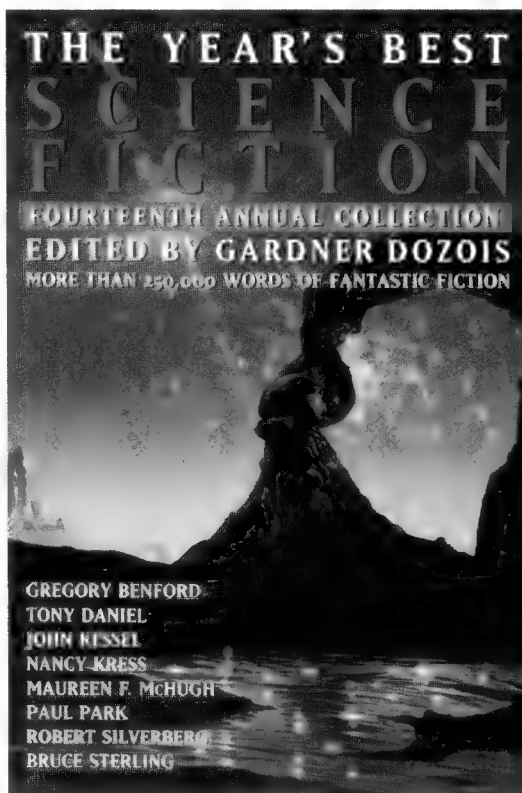
As you'd expect from past form, Bruce Sterling's "Bicycle Repairman" is clever, sharp, slick (in the best sense of the word) grungy near-future cyberpunk. But Gregory Feeley's absorbing "The Weighing of Ayre" was a very pleasant surprise. At first glance, the premise for this story – an early case of biological warfare during the 17th century strife betwixt England and Holland – may not sound that promising, but the conviction and meticulous attention to detail with which Feeley paints his canvas is like opening a window onto the past.

The collection is certainly not all bad then, but the hit-miss ratio has dropped alarmingly this year. Needless to say we haven't read all the sf stories published for 1996, so the question for the very well-read (and opinionated) out there who have is: are these stories really the best of this year's crop?

(Because if they are then it was a bum year for sf). But if there are stronger stories out there, why does Dozois prefer the ones we rate as misses? Perhaps it's just that tastes differ. But, reluctantly, our verdict on this book is – hard going, well down on Dozois's usual standard, and unless you particularly want to plough through a mostly so-so selection of the field, give it a miss.

But before we end, here's a chance for you to decide if we Neils are right on the money – or just a pair of sour reviewers. It just so happens that one of the stories we thought belonged slap in the extremely so-so class appeared (sorry, Mr Pringle) right here in *Interzone* – Stephen Baxter's "In the MSOB," the one about the geriatric man lying in hospital who, it turns out, used to be an astronaut. Baxter has written his share of strong stories, but in our opinion this most definitely isn't one of them. And if you disagree with that assessment then you're probably on your way out to buy this latest batch of Dozois's best right now – and you're very welcome to it.

Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh



BOOKS RECEIVED



AUGUST
1997

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Ackerman, Forrest J. **Ackermanthology! 65 Astonishing, Rediscovered Sci-Fi Shorts.** Foreword by John Landis. General Publishing Group [2701 Ocean Park Boulevard, Santa Monica, CA 90405, USA], ISBN 1-57544-056-3, 303pp, trade paperback, \$12.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; distributed in Britain by Gazelle Books Services Ltd, Lancaster [01524-68765]; reprint stories, mainly short-stories but with a few longer ones interspersed, by Isaac Asimov, Jerome Bixby, Ray Bradbury, Ray Cummings, H. L. Gold, A. Merritt, C. L. Moore, Sam Moskowitz, A. E. van Vogt, Robert Moore Williams, Donald A. Wollheim and many others: a strange, bitty anthology, with some of the stories well known but others exceedingly obscure; H. G. Wells is represented with the same brief, cancelled extract from the serialized version of *The Time Machine* that Peter Haining uses in his new anthology *Timescapes* [see below]; Ackerman calls it "The Final Men," while Haining calls it "The Grey Man.") No date shown: received in August 1997.

Asaro, Catherine. **The Last Hawk.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86044-7, 446pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; third in the "Saga of the Skolian Empire" series, by a physicist-author who is praised for her "unique blend of cutting-edge theoretical physics and fast-paced romantic adventure.") November 1997.

Atkins, Peter. **Big Thunder.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224596-5, 273pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition; "a gentleman vigilante from the pages of a 1930s pulp magazine materializes in present-day Manhattan..."; it sounds rather like Kim Newman's "The Original Dr Shade"; this is Liverpoolian Atkins's second novel, following *Morningstar* [1992]; the longish gap can be accounted for by the fact that he has been busy in Hollywood; this is what happens to some writers, particularly in the horror field: they get lured to L.A., where they work on

straight-to-video or television trash, much of which never gets made, much of which they never even get credit for [it consists of rewrite jobs] – but presumably they get paid very well and just can't resist the swimming-pool lifestyle.) 15th September 1997.

Attanasio, A. A. **Centuries.** "The towering novel of the next Millennium." Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-66699-4, 437pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Warner, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition [?]; an ambitious-looking book, it's not just about the upcoming turn of the millennium but about the next millennium as a whole.) 28th August 1997.

Benford, Gregory, ed. **Far Futures.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86379-9, 348pp, trade paperback, \$15.95. (Sf anthology, first published in 1995; it contains an introduction by Benford, mainly about the fate of the universe billions of years hence, and five long stories on the distant-future theme by Poul Anderson, Greg Bear, Joe Haldeman, Donald Kingsbury and Charles Sheffield; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 103.) 11th September 1997.

Bester, Alfred. **Virtual Unrealities: The Short Fiction of Alfred Bester.** Introduction by Robert Silverberg. Random House/Vintage, ISBN 0-679-76783-5, xiii+366pp, trade paperback, \$14. (Sf collection, first edition; proof copy received; the best of Bester was repackaged once before, in a 1970s volume called *Starlight: The Great Short Fiction of Alfred Bester*, but that is long out of print; this new version, which is a "Byron Preiss Visual Publications, Inc. Book," contains a previously unpublished story, "The Devil Without Glasses" [it's "copyright 1997 by the Alfred Bester Estate"]; the rest of the book consists of good old stuff, mostly written in the 1950s.) November 1997.

Brenchley, Chaz. **Light Errant.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-68556-5, 314pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror [?] novel, first edition; sequel to *Dead of Light*.) 18th September 1997.

Callander, Don. **Aeromancer.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00472-5, 289pp, A-format paperback, cover by Don Clavette, \$5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; belated follow-up to *Pyromancer* [1992], *Aquamancer* [1993] and *Geomancer* [1994], none of which we saw.) 1st September 1997.

Christian, Deborah. **Mainline.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-54908-2, 374pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bruce Jensen, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by James Lovegrove in *Interzone* 114.) August 1997.

Cooper, Louise. **Sacrament of Night.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-1716-5, 344pp, hardcover, cover by J. Sullivan, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 11th September 1997.

Crowther, Peter, ed. **Destination Unknown.** Introduction by Anne McCaffrey. White Wolf Publishing [735 Park North Blvd., Suite 128, Clarkston, GA 30021, USA], ISBN 1-56504-941-1, 316pp, trade paperback, cover by Douglas Winter, \$12.99. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first edition; all-original stories by Ramsey Campbell, Storm Constantine, Charles de Lint, Terry Dowling, Alan Dean Foster, Christopher Fowler, Kathleen Ann Goonan, R. A. Lafferty, Bentley Little, James Lovegrove, Ian McDonald, Tom Shippey, Lisa Tuttle, Ian Watson and others; a strong line-up; we've heard of their existence, but this and the other Crowther anthology listed

immediately below are the first White Wolf books we've ever seen; a Georgia-based games company. White Wolf publish many works by British, or British-resident, authors, so it's a pity they seem so reluctant to send out review copies.) No date shown: 1997 publication sent to us by the editor, August 1997.

Crowther, Peter, ed. **Tales in Time.** Introduction by John Clute. White Wolf Publishing [735 Park North Blvd., Suite 128, Clarkston, GA 30021, USA], ISBN 1-56504-989-6, 284pp, trade paperback, cover by Larry S. Friedman, \$12.99. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; reprint stories on the time theme, by Brian Aldiss, Ray Bradbury, L. Sprague de Camp, Charles de Lint, Harlan Ellison, Jack Finney, Garry Kilworth, "Lewis Padgett," Spider Robinson, Robert Silverberg, James Tiptree, Jr., Ian Watson and H. G. Wells; it makes an interesting comparison with the near-simultaneously published time-travel anthology *Timescapes*, edited by Peter Haining [see below]; in fact, the two books have just one story in common, Aldiss's "Man in His Time"; the Haining has more stories [some of them just vignettes], but I'd give the literary edge to the Crowther volume.) No date shown: 1997 publication sent to us by the editor, August 1997.

Daniel, Tony. **Earthling.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85571-0, 282pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a second novel by the author of *Warpath* [1993].) December 1997.

Dietz, William C. **Imperial Bounty.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-36697-X, 278pp, A-format paperback, cover by Tom Miller, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; second Ace printing; second in the "Sam McCade, Interstellar Bounty Hunter" series.) 1st September 1997.

Duncan, Dave. **Present Tense: Round Two of the Great Game.** AvoNova, ISBN 0-380-78130-1, xii+418pp, A-format paperback, cover by Matt Stawicki, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996.) August 1997.

Dunn, J. R. **Days of Cain.** Avon, ISBN 0-380-97433-9, 328pp, hardcover, \$23. (Sf novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; a second novel by the military-historian author of *This Side of Judgment*, it involves time-travel back to the Nazi era in an attempt to change history.) August 1997.

Dyson, Jeremy. **Bright Darkness: The Lost Art of the Supernatural Horror Film.** Foreword by Peter Crowther. Cassell, ISBN 0-304-34038-3, xvii+282pp, trade paperback, £14.99. (Critical study of horror movies, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; it contains eight pages of film stills in a central section; here we have something unusual: a mere stripling of a critic [born in the late 1960s] who prefers old black-and-white horror films to their more recent colour offspring: he argues his apparently fogeyish case well – and he's right, of course.) August 1997.

Eddings, David and Leigh. **Polgara the Sorceress.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-41662-7, 643pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1997; proof copy received; the publishers describe it as a "crown jewel to the saga that is the Eddings' *Belgariad* and *Mallorcan* cycles"; it is "the epic culmination of a magnificent

saga, and a fitting farewell to a world which, once experienced, will never be forgotten"; are they hinting that Mr and Mrs Eddings are going to write no more books?) 1st November 1997.

Elliott, Kate. **King's Dragon: Volume One of Crown of Stars.** Legend, ISBN 0-09-925536-7, xii+522pp, hardcover, cover by Melvin Grant, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1997; its states "Copyright Katrina Elliott" on the reverse of the title page, which is odd, because Kate, or Katrina, Elliott is a pseudonym for Alice A. Rasmussen.) 7th August 1997.

Evans, David. **Time Station Berlin.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00473-3, 266pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jeff Walker, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the third of a series which began with *Time Station London* [1996] and *Time Station Paris* [1997], it's copyright "Bill Fawcett and Associates.") September 1997.

Garnett, David, ed. **New Worlds.** Consulting editor Michael Moorcock. White Wolf Publishing [735 Park North Blvd., Suite 128, Clarkston, GA 30021, USA], ISBN 1-56504-190-9, 357pp, trade paperback, \$12.99. (Sf anthology, first edition; the small print on the back of the title page states that this is "New Worlds Vol. 64 No. 222" – the latest incarnation of what used to be a UK monthly magazine and later a paperback-original anthology series; alas, this volume, the first to be published initially in America, has the smell of a one-off; but if it is to be the last, under Garnett's editorship at least, it's going out with flying colours: it's the biggest *New Worlds* ever, with a fine line-up of new material by Brian Aldiss, Eric Brown, Pat Cadigan, William Gibson [yes, a new Gibson story, and not just a vignette], Peter F. Hamilton & Graham Joyce, Garry Kilworth, Kim Newman, Howard Waldrop, Ian Watson and a few others including a couple of relative newcomers, Noel K. Hannan and Christine Manby; recommended.) No date shown: sent to us by the editor, August 1997.

Gemmell, David A. **Echges of the Great Song.** Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-03715-4, 350pp, hardcover, cover by John Howe, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 9th October 1997.

Gemmell, David. **The Last Guardian: The Stones of Power, Book Four.** "First United States edition!" Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-37900-4, 296pp, A-format paperback, cover by Royo, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel [or, more accurately, "science fantasy," since it's set partly in the future and partly in ancient Atlantis], first published in the UK, 1989; reviewed by Phyllis McDonald in *Interzone* 37.) Late entry: 1st July publication, received in August 1997.

Gemmell, David A. **Winter Warriors.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14254-9, 412pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Howe, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1997; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 122.) 9th October 1997.

Gibson, William. **Idoru.** Berkley, ISBN 0-425-15864-0, 383pp, A-format paperback, \$6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 114; the publishers have fattened it up, with large print and wide margins, for this mass-market edition; aimed at the mainstream readership [and therefore not included in Berkley's "Ace" imprint], it also comes with all sorts of enclaves; reviewers made these comparisons: "Gibson, like Hemingway, possesses the ability to paint a living,

breathing portrait of the world"; "Prose simultaneously as hard and laconic as Elmore Leonard's and as galactically poetic as J. G. Ballard's"; "Gibson is the Raymond Chandler of the digital age.") 1st September 1997.

Goodkind, Terry. **Blood of the Fold.** "Book Three of *The Sword of Truth*." Tor, ISBN 0-812-55147-8, 623pp, A-format paperback, cover by Kevin Murphy, \$6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 119.) August 1997.

Goodkind, Terry. **Temple of the Winds.** "Book Four of *The Sword of Truth*." Tor, ISBN 0-312-89053-2, 528pp, hardcover, \$26.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the accompanying publicity letter from editor James Frenkel makes much of the fact that although this is the fourth of a series it "stands well on its own" and that Goodkind "continues to improve as a writer"; we mustn't assume that his books are "standard" fantasy fare," because "they're really much more unusual than they appear...") October 1997.

Haining, Peter, ed. **The Flying Sorcerers: More Comic Tales of Fantasy.** Souvenir Press, ISBN 0-285-63388-0, 270pp, hardcover, cover by Josh Kirby, £16.99. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; 24 reprint stories, including work by, among others, Piers Anthony, Robert Bloch, Fredric Brown, Angela Carter, Arthur C. Clarke, John Collier, Roald Dahl, L. Sprague de Camp, Thomas M. Disch, Harry Harrison, Stephen Leacock, Stanislaw Lem, C. S. Lewis, Michael Moorcock, Mervyn Peake and the inevitable Terry Pratchett [considering Pratchett has only written about two-and-a-half short stories, it's amazing how Haining keeps finding them]; a good line-up, which also includes work by Eric Knight [one of his Sam Small, the Flying Yorkshireman, stories from the 1940s] and P. G. Wodehouse [one of his Mulliner stories from the 1920s]; recommended.) 28th August 1997.

Haining, Peter, ed. **Timescapes: Stories of Time Travel.** Souvenir Press, ISBN 0-285-63387-2, 288pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf anthology, first edition; 24 reprint stories on all aspects of time; two new Haining volumes in the same month!; he is certainly an anthologist who believes in the value of a mega line-up of "names" [see his last sf effort, *Cyber-Killers*, produced under the pseudonym Ric Alexander for Orion]; this one contains stories by Brian Aldiss, Martin Amis, Isaac Asimov, J. G. Ballard, Alfred Bester, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, Philip K. Dick, Jack Finney, William Gibson, Robert A. Heinlein, C. M. Kornbluth, Michael Moorcock, Fredrik Pohl, Eric Frank Russell, H. G. Wells and others [all male, and mostly people whose work Haining would have known when he used to work as an editor at New English Library, in the 1960s]; many of the pieces are over-familiar, but a few are welcome rediscoveries.) 28th August 1997.

Halperin, James L. **The Truth Machine.** "A novel of things to come." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-41288-5, vii+396pp, A-format paperback, \$6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 118; a debut novel by a new American writer which belongs to "mainstream sf" — i.e. it's a serious-minded, perhaps ponderous, futuristic utopian fiction aimed at the non-genre audience.) 1st August 1997.

Hendrix, Howard V. **Lightpaths.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00470-9, 345pp, A-format paperback, cover by Phil Heffernan, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a debut novel by an American writer already known for his short fiction and criticism; it's set in a "utopian" orbital city, and comes with advance praise from Michael Bishop and Robert J. Sawyer.) 1st September 1997.

Holland, Tom. **Supping with Panthers.** Warner, ISBN 0-7515-1485-3, 502pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Historical horror novel, first published in 1996; the second novel by the praised author [still in his 20s] of *The Vampire* and the more recent *Deliver Us from Evil*; we never saw the hardcover of this one, and hence it didn't get reviewed in *Interzone* last year, but it looks like great fun — set in the 1890s, with Bram Stoker, Oscar Wilde and other worthies encountering an undead Lord Byron...) 11th September 1997.

Irving, Clifford. **The Spring.** Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-684-82101-X, 287pp, hardcover, cover by Sam Hadley, £15.99. (Marginally sf thriller, first published in the USA, 1996; set in Colorado, this appears to be straight crime fiction at first, but it turns out that the "spring" of the title is a Fountain of Youth, or something; Irving is the author who became notorious about 20 years ago for publishing *The Autobiography of Howard Hughes*; one notes that among his other books are such titles as *Fake!* and *The Hoax*; hmm — maybe he has been a fantasy writer all along.) 28th August 1997.

Jacq, Christian. **Ramses: The Son of the Light.** Translated by Mary Feeney. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-684-82136-2, vi+360pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Historical novel, first published in France, 1995; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; this appears to have no fantasy content, but nevertheless should appeal to readers of "dynastic fantasy"; it is to be followed by four sequels, all dramatizing the life of the pharaoh Ramses II; the second in the series bears the splendidly sf-y title of *The Temple of a Million Years*; Christian Jacq [born 1947] is described as "France's leading Egyptologist," and these books have been huge bestsellers on the continent.) 8th September 1997.

James, Roby. **Commitment.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40979-5, x+436pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bruce Jensen, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a follow-up to the author's first novel, *Commencement* [1996] — isn't the close similarity of title a bit silly?) Late entry: 1st July publication, received in August 1997.

Jeffries, Francesca. **Sweet Sixteen.** Point Horror, ISBN 0-590-19374-0, 202pp, A-format paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile horror novel, first published in the USA, 1997; the reverse of the title pages states: "Copyright: Gail Herman, 1996.") 15th August 1997.

Lawhead, Stephen R. **Grail: Book V of the Pendragon Cycle.** Lion, ISBN 0-7459-3882-5, viii+374pp, hardcover, cover by Eric Peterson and Mike Posen, £16.99. (Arthurian fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; this is the last volume in the series by this British-based American author: it began some years ago with *Talesin, Merlin, Arthur and Pendragon*; Lawhead has sold some two million books worldwide, they tell us.) 19th September 1997.

McAuley, Paul J. **Fairyland.** AvoNova, ISBN 0-380-79429-2, 405pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bruce Jensen, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1995; winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award; reviewed by James Lovegrove in *Interzone* 99.) August 1997.

McCaffrey, Anne. **Freedom's Choice.** "The second of the fascinating Catteni sequence." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14273-5, 413pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Elson, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1997.) 9th October 1997.

McCormack, Patrick. **Albion: The Last Companion.** "A Novel of Arthurian Britain." Raven, ISBN 1-85487-412-8, ix+469pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Arthurian fantasy [?] novel, first edition; proof copy received; by a new British writer, it looks as though it may be a straight historical novel of Dark Age Britain rather than a fantasy of the usual stripe; the author is a second-hand bookseller in Devon.) 25th September 1997.

McDowell, Ian. **Merlin's Gift.** AvoNova, ISBN 0-380-78197-2, 251pp, A-format paperback, cover by Lars Hokanson, \$5.99. (Arthurian fantasy novel, first edition; second in the revisionist series which began with *Mordred's Curse* [1996; not to be confused with Haydn Middleton's *Mordred* trilogy — see under Middleton, below]; you can tell that it's revisionist when it has an opening sentence like the following: "None of this would have happened if Guinevere's little sister hadn't grown a penis.") August 1997.

MacLeod, Ken. **The Stone Canal.** Legend, ISBN 0-09-955901-3, 322pp, B-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1996; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 100; it contains a 20-page snippet from the author's forthcoming third novel, *The Cassini Division*, at the rear: it's the first time we've noticed this naff practice — akin to TV announcers doing loud voice-overs on the end-credits of televised movies — in a "serious" novel [it's more commonly the case with *Star Trek* spinoffs and the like]; and this book is published in snob-back format too!; we hope it doesn't become a regular habit with UK publishers.) 7th August 1997.

May, Julian. **Magnificat: Volume III of the Galactic Milieu Trilogy.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-36249-7, 418pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Harrison, \$6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 109.) 1st August 1997.

May, Julian. **Sky Trillium.** "The dramatic conclusion to the Trillium saga." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648265-1, 379pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; fifth in the "Trillium" series, initiated by Julian May but other parts of which have been written by Marion Zimmer Bradley and Andre Norton.) 1st September 1997.

Middleton, Haydn. **The Knight's Vengeance: A Mordred Cycle Novel.** Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-91369-3, 281pp, hardcover, cover by Stephen Player, £16.99. (Arthurian fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; a follow-up to *The King's Evil* and *The Queen's Captive*, it comes with praise from Michael Moorcock, Philip Pullman and others, and appears to be dark, bloody, Henry Treece-like stuff.) 4th September 1997.

Miller, Walter M., Jr. **A Canticle for Leibowitz.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-014-

0, 356pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Goodfellow, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1959; third Orbit printing since 1993; winner of the 1960 Hugo Award; a five-star book, one of the all-time classics of sf — subtle, ironic, funny and disturbing: read it now if you never have.) 4th September 1997.

Miller, Walter M., Jr. [with Terry Bisson]. **Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-013-2, 403pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA [?], 1997; long-delayed sequel to *A Canticle for Leibowitz*; this was first announced for publication back in the early 1990s, but it seems that Miller, who died in 1996, never could bring himself to finish it; it was largely complete, though, and Terry Bisson, whose name is confined to a back-of-the-title-page note in this edition, has provided a conclusion.) 4th September 1997.

Moorcock, Michael. **Elric: The Return to Melniboné.** Illustrated by Philippe Druliet. Jayde Design [45 St Mary's Mansions, St Mary's Terr., London W2 1SH], ISBN 0-9520074-3-6, 24pp, very large-format paperback, £10. (Graphic short story, first published in 1973; apparently this has been a rare collectors' item, in its original booklet edition, for many a long year; and is now reprinted here especially for Moorcock enthusiasts; striking black-and-white graphics, as one would expect from Druliet.) 28th August 1997.

Penley, Constance. **NASA/TREK: Popular Science and Sex in America.** Verso, ISBN 0-86091-617-0, 169pp, small-format trade paperback, no price shown. (Study of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's relationship to the sf TV show *Star Trek*, and of so-called "slash" fiction [i.e. unofficially published Trekkie fan pornography]; first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; this looks like an interesting little left-leaning academic item, by a Professor of Film Studies and Women's Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara.) Not actually received for review: 1997 publication bought in a Brighton second-hand bookshop, August 1997.

Pohl, Frederik. **The Siege of Eternity.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86375-6, 312pp, hardcover, cover by John Harris, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *The Other End of Time* in what is now to be known as "The Eschaton Sequence.") November 1997.

Pullman, Philip. **The Subtle Knife.** "His Dark Materials II." Scholastic Press, ISBN 0-590-54243-5, 341pp, hardcover, cover by David Scutt, £12.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first edition [?]; this is, as they say, the "long-awaited" follow-up to the much praised *Northern Lights* [1995; published in the USA as *The Golden Compass*], which won the Carnegie Medal, the Guardian Children's Fiction Award and goodness knows what else.) 19th September 1997.

Rawn, Melanie, Jennifer Roberson and Kate Elliott. **The Golden Key.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-34776-4, 1074pp, A-format paperback, cover by Michael Whelan, £7.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; about a world of magical paintings, and artists in search of the "golden key" to their craft, it has a pseudo-Portuguese flavour [judging from the made-up names]; the striking cover painting, by





multi-award-winning artist Whelan, would seem to be a self-portrait.) 19th September 1997.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. **Icehege.** Voyager. ISBN 0-00-648225-4, 262pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Elson, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1984; this was Robinson's second-published novel, and concerns the discovery of a monument on Pluto with an inscription in Sanskrit; it also contains the author's first stab at a depiction of life on Mars; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 16.) 15th September 1997.

Robinson, Nigel. **Third Degree.** Point SF. ISBN 0-590-19325-2, 282pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steinar Lund, £3.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first edition; probably a follow-up to the same author's *First Contact* [1994] and *Second Nature* [1996].) 15th August 1997.

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn. **Alien Influences.** Bantam/Spectra. ISBN 0-553-56998-8, 340pp, A-format paperback, \$5.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1994; proof copy received; this appears to be the first US edition – curiously delayed, considering that the author is an American, and well-known.) 10th November 1997.

Russell, Mary Doria. **The Sparrow.** Black Swan. ISBN 0-552-99777-3, 506pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; proof copy received; reviewed, glowingly, by Brian Stableford in *Interzone* 116; this debut novel by an American anthropologist was widely praised, and won the Tiptree Award; a film version starring Antonio Banderas

is said to be in production.) 13th November 1997.

Somtow, S. P. **The Pavilion of Frozen Women.** Vista. ISBN 0-575-60074-8, 272pp, A-format paperback, cover by Max Schindler, £5.99. (Horror/fantasy collection, first published in the USA [?], 1996; it contains ten stories, mostly first published in original anthologies such as *Cold Shocks*, *Phobias* and *The Ultimate Frankenstein*.) 28th August 1997.

Stine, R. L. **Goosebumps Collection 7: Return of the Mummy, The Scarecrow Walks at Midnight, Attack of the Mutant.** Scholastic/Hippo. ISBN 0-590-19445-3, 366pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Juvenile horror omnibus, first edition; the three constituent novels were originally published separately in the USA, 1994 and 1995; all are copyright "Parachute Press, Inc.") August 1997.

Swanwick, Michael. **Jack Faust.** Avon. ISBN 0-380-97444-4, 337pp, hardcover, cover by Greg Spalenka, £23. (Sf/historical fantasy novel, first edition; a retelling of the Faust legend, it carries a commendation from William Gibson: "madly ambitious and brilliantly executed, recasting the entire history of science in a wholly original version of our culture's central myth of knowledge, power and sorrow"; reviewed, glowingly, by Brian Stableford in this issue of *Interzone*.) 6th August 1997.

Swanwick, Michael. **A Geography of Unknown Lands.** Illustrated by Lee Moyer. Tigereyes Press [PO Box 172, Lemoyne, PA 17043, USA]. ISBN 0-931763-07-X, 154pp, hardcover, cover

by Moyer, \$25. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition priced at \$12; this is a handsome small-press book of five longish stories, one of them previously unpublished; recommended.) No date shown: received in August 1997.

Taylor, Bruce. **The Final Trick of Funnyman and Other Stories.** Introduction by John Dalmas. The Ministry of Whimsy Press [PO Box 4248, Tallahassee, FL 32315, USA]. ISBN 1-890464-00-7, 187pp, trade paperback, cover by Scott Eagle, \$12.99. (Horror/fantasy collection, first edition; a nicely-designed book: it includes over two dozen stories reprinted in the main from small-press magazines but also from such professional venues as *Twilight Zone* and the *New Dimensions* anthology series; Terry Brooks, Jack Cady and Robert Silverberg all commend Taylor's writing.) 1st September 1997.

Tolkien, J. R. R. **The Hobbit, or There and Back Again.** Illustrated by Alan Lee. HarperCollins. ISBN 0-261-10330-X, ix+289pp, hardcover, £20. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in 1937; this is a new *de luxe* 60th-anniversary edition, with customarily pretty paintings and drawings by Lee; the price rises to £25 on 1st January 1998; we're informed that Lee's illustrated edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, from about six years ago, sold over 200,000 copies – extremely good for a fat, expensive hardcover book in Britain.) 18th September 1997.

Watt-Evans, Lawrence. **Touched by the Gods.** Tor. ISBN 0-312-86060-9, 380pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Fantasy

novel, first edition; proof copy received.) November 1997.

White, Tony. **Road Rage!** "Cider punk fiction for the thump'n'grind generation!" Low Life [S.T. Publishing, PO Box 12, Lockerbie, Dumfriesshire DG11 3BW]. ISBN 1-898928-25-8, 125pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror-porn novel, first edition; good grief, what have we here? – a novel about "crusties" who are fighting a road-building programme with supernatural help: "After shagging a mysterious tattooed girl in a pub bog, [the hero] finds his cock covered in ancient Celtic runes... He later discovers that [they] hold the key to a vast and powerful ancient magic.") August 1997.

Willis, Connie. **To Say Nothing of the Dog; or, How We Found the Bishop's Bird Stump at Last.** Bantam/Spectra. ISBN 0-553-09995-7, 434pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Humorous sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; another example of Steam-punkish American Englishry, it's dedicated: "To Robert A. Heinlein, who, in *Have Space Suit, Will Travel*, first introduced me to Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*, to say nothing of the dog.") 8th December 1997.

Wrede, Patricia C. **The Magicians' Ward.** Tor. ISBN 0-312-85369-6, 288pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; a follow-up to the author's *Mairelon the Magician* [1991], it's "man-nerpunk"; set in Regency England.) December 1997.

Allen, Roger MacBride. **Isaac Asimov's Caliban.** Ace. ISBN 0-441-00482-2, 312pp, A-format paperback, cover by Ralph McQuarrie, \$5.99. (Sharecrop sf novel, first published in the USA, 1993; a "Byron Preiss Visual Publications, Inc." novel, and first of a series.) 1st September 1997.

Carey, Diane. **Ancient Blood: Day of Honor, Book One of Four.** "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Pocket. ISBN 0-671-00238-4, 280pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; this is the American first edition with a British price added.) September 1997.

Carrazé, Alain, and Jean-Luc Putheaud. **The Avengers Companion.** Translated by Paul Buck. Titan. ISBN 1-85286-728-0, 194pp, very large-format paperback, £14.99. (Copiously illustrated study of the 1960s sf/thriller TV series *The Avengers*; first published in France as *Chapeau melon et bottes de cuir* ["Bowler Hat and Leather Boots"]; 1990; fancy that – a French fan-book for a lousy old British TV show!) 26th September 1997.

Crispin, A. C. **The Hutt Gambit: The Han Solo Trilogy, Book Two.** "Star Wars." Bantam. ISBN 0-553-50547-5, 340pp, A-format paperback, cover by Drew Struzan, £5.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; follow-up to the same author's *The Paradise Snare*, which we were not sent.) 11th September 1997.

Gaiman, Neil. **Neverwhere.** Avon. ISBN 0-380-97363-4, 337pp, hardcover, \$24. (Fantasy TV-serial novelization, first published in the UK, 1996; we never saw the British edition of this [published by BBC Books, who were unaware of this magazine's existence at the time], but here is the American version, with revised text and presented as Gaiman's "long-awaited

Spinoffery

This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.

first solo novel" – with all references to the rather tacky BBC serial downplayed [dull British actors bickering amidst cardboard sets, in some director's misguided attempt to recapture the production values of *Doctor Who*; the Beeb's worst mistake was to schedule it up against *The X-Files*, and the contrast was painful]; the book comes decked out with glowing quotes from the Gaiman U.S. fan club – Tori Amos, Clive Barker, Mark Frost, Stephen King, Peter Straub, Tad Williams, etc.) Late entry: July publication, received in August 1997.

Graf, L. A. **Armageddon Sky: Day of Honor, Book Two of Four.** "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine." Pocket. ISBN 0-671-00675-4, 279pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; this is the American first edition with a British price added.) September 1997.

Hand, Elizabeth. **The Frenchman.** "Millennium, 1." HarperCollins. ISBN 0-00-648337-2, 213pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror TV-series novelization, first published in the USA, 1997; it's based on the series' pilot script by Chris Carter; the print is very large, and the chapters are very short, with white space in between: they probably could have squeezed this book into half the number of pages.) 15th September 1997.

Jones, Stephen, ed. **Shadows Over Innsmouth.** Illustrated by Dave Carson, Martin McKenna and Jim Pitts. Gol-

lancz. ISBN 0-575-06572-9, 339pp, C-format paperback, cover by George Underwood, £9.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA, 1994; Lovecraftian pastiches, mostly original to the volume, by British writers: Ramsey Campbell, Basil Copper, Neil Gaiman, David Langford, D. F. Lewis, Brian Lumley, Nicholas Royle, Guy N. Smith, Michael Marshall Smith, Brian Stableford, Peter Tremayne and others; Kim Newman's "The Big Fish," which is a homage to Raymond Chandler as well as Lovecraft, first appeared in *Interzone* in 1993; originally published in Minneapolis in 1994, it's taken a surprisingly long time for this volume to appear in Britain.) 20th August 1997.

McCaffrey, Anne, with Richard Woods. **A Diversity of Dragons.** Illustrated by John Howe. Simon & Schuster. ISBN 0-684-82112-5, 96pp, very large-format hardcover, £16.99. (Book of "dragon lore," probably intended for children and probably a sharecrop [i.e. mainly written by Woods, leaning on McCaffrey's name and fame]; first edition; it's nicely illustrated in colour throughout, and it contains chunks of text quoted from Gordon R. Dickson, Kenneth Grahame, Ursula Le Guin, Terry Pratchett, Jane Yolen and others.) 6th October 1997.

Molstad, Stephen. **Silent Zone.** "Independence Day." Voyager. ISBN 0-00-224671-6, 268pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the

USA, 1997; a prequel to the film *Independence Day*, created by Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich; Molstad, hitherto unknown as a writer, was the novelizer of that movie, and previously had an uncredited hand in the novelization of the same team's *StarGate*.) 18th August 1997.

Reeves-Stevens, Judith and Garfield. **The Art of Star Trek.** Introduction by Herman Zimmerman. Pocket. ISBN 0-671-01776-4, xxi+295pp, very large-format paperback, cover by John Knoll and Mikido Uesugi, £20. (Sf TV-series art portfolio, with descriptive text; first published in the USA, 1995; this is the American trade paperback edition with a British price added.) October 1997.

Salvatore, R. A. **Tarzan: The Epic Adventures.** Del Rey. ISBN 0-345-41295-8, 280pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Fantasy TV series novelization, based on a script by Burton Armus, which in turn was based on two novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs, *The Return of Tarzan* [1915] and *Tarzan at the Earth's Core* [1930]; first published in the USA, 1996.) 1st August 1997.

Schweighofer, Peter, ed. **Tales from the Empire.** "Star Wars." Bantam/Spectra. ISBN 0-553-57876-6, xxi+323pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf movie-series spinoff anthology, first edition; proof copy received; contributors include Michael A. Stackpole, Kathy Tyers, Timothy Zahn and several unknowns recruited from the pages of the *Official Star Wars Adventure Journal*, of which – surprise, surprise – Peter Schweighofer is the editor.) 3rd November 1997.

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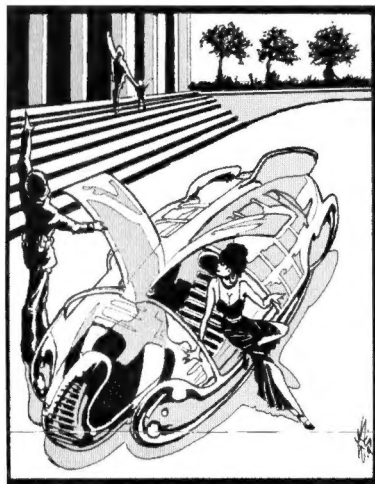
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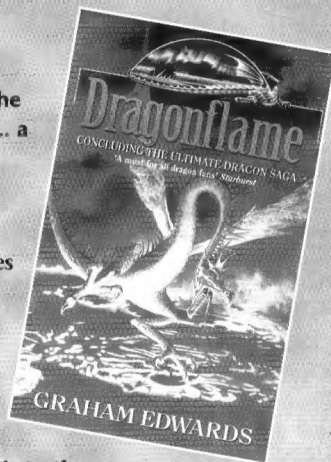
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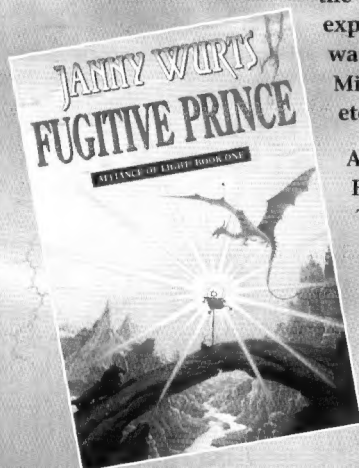
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